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'We have nothing left. The flood took away everything'

At least 579 confirmed dead and 1,900 missing following Nepal disaster

Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Gaurav Pokharel *Bidur*

The three women sat together in the army tent and wept. They cried out for their sons, their husbands, their homes. On Wednesday morning, flash floods had coursed through the Himalayan mountains, and a monstrous black wave had taken everything from them.

As a melting glacier high up in the Himalayas between Tibet and Nepal splintered and crashed into the valley below, it set off a deadly cascade of water, mud and debris down the Bhotekoshi River. The impact was so strong, experts initially reported it as an earthquake. The homes that lined the riverbank and clung to the mountainside stood little chance.

Sangke Dolma Tamang, 61, had been cheerily cooking snacks in her village of Mailung in Nepal's Rasuwa district, when the floods came without warning. The whole family ran uphill for safety, but as she grabbed for her husband, he slipped from her grip and was washed into the dark, fast-moving waters.

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▲ *A survivor yesterday in Bidur, from where the rescue effort is being coordinated* PHOTOGRAPH: AHMER KHAN/THE GUARDIAN

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Doctors agree first universal definition of heart attack in care 'revolution' for women

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

Doctors have agreed the world's first universal definition of a heart attack, paving the way for women to finally receive better treatment after decades of being "deprioritised".

In one of the biggest shake-ups of medical guidelines in a generation, the world's four leading cardiovascular health groups have signed off on new guidance for healthcare professionals when seeing suspected heart attack patients.

Historically, less common forms of heart attacks, which evidence shows typically affect women far more than men, have been coded as less important, with treatment and care often worse as a result.

Until now, experts said, women were given less effective treatments that did not always target the specific cause of their heart attack and could even make them more unwell.

Now the world's top cardiologists have promised a "revolution" in care after agreeing the biggest overhaul to how heart attacks are defined and diagnosed, in part to reduce the often deadly delays afflicting women.

The agreement was announced in Munich on the opening day of the annual congress of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), the world's largest heart conference.

The new guidance will upgrade three types of attack that are up to 10 times more common in women and often caused by childbirth, exercise and emotional stress.

The most serious cases, previously known as "type 1" and now classed as "primary" heart attacks, had previously prioritised those caused by a clot blocking blood flow to the heart.

But the types of attacks more common in women involve reduced blood flow for other reasons, such as a tear or tightening of arteries, and are more likely to be missed or not treated as urgently, with delays to care.

> *'This could be life-changing for huge numbers of women in UK and worldwide'*
>
> **Prof Bryan Williams**
> *British Heart Foundation*

The new guidelines will also reduce the threshold for any type of heart attack to be diagnosed in women based upon the levels of a protein called troponin in their blood.

Until now, women had been expected to reach the same threshold as men for troponin - which is released when the heart is injured and damaged - to get a diagnosis.

Speaking to reporters in Munich, Prof Bryan Williams, the British Heart Foundation's chief scientific officer, said: "This is a landmark moment - a radical shift in how we define and diagnose heart attacks worldwide which will transform people's care.

"For decades, women have missed out on accurate diagnoses and treatment. This focus on finding less common causes of heart attacks, which predominantly affect women, should help to change that. It could be life-changing for huge numbers of women in the UK and worldwide."

Crucially, the new streamlined heart attack categories will also help patients to fully understand the cause of their heart attack and what comes next, Williams said.

The three types of heart attacks that have been upgraded - and which mostly affect women - are a coronary artery spasm, coronary embolism, and spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD).

The first involves the tightening of the artery, which can deprive the heart muscle of blood and oxygen and cause a heart attack, and can be caused by emotional stress, exercise or extreme cold.

The second is where a blood clot or fatty deposit travels to a coronary artery and causes a blockage. The third is caused by a tear in the coronary artery, which occurs in women 80% of the time and often happens during or soon after pregnancy.

Prof Nicholas Mills, a cardiologist at Edinburgh University who led the international taskforce of doctors that agreed the new guidelines, said it was "the first time that we've had a truly global approach to aligning how we diagnose what is probably the most important diagnosis there is".

"Our job now is to implement this as widely as possible ... It is a revolution. It's going to make care better for patients."

Mills said there had been "unintended systematic bias against women", including by using the key blood test for diagnosing heart attacks at an average level, which picks up all men but misses some women. "This is used for all types of heart attack in every emergency department in the world, and we want to make sure it's used correctly," he said.

The new guidelines, published in the European Heart Journal, were drawn up by the world's four leading cardiovascular health groups: the ESC, the American College of Cardiology, the American Heart Association and the World Heart Federation.

Sweetener used in toothpaste and gum linked to higher risk of strokes and death

Andrew Gregory

▶ *The sweetener xylitol is often added to gum, as well as products such as jam and ice-cream*
PHOTOGRAPH: FLUXFACTORY/ GETTY IMAGES

A common sweetener used in products such as chewing gum, toothpaste, jam, yoghurts and ice-cream worldwide has been linked to an increased risk of strokes, heart attacks and death.

Xylitol is a sugar alcohol present in some natural foods in very low amounts. It is also added - often in amounts 1,000 times higher - to artificially sweeten foods, drinks and oral care products.

Despite its growing use, the long-term health impacts have never been widely studied.

In the largest study of its kind, researchers found high blood levels of xylitol were associated with an increased risk of major adverse cardiovascular events. The findings were presented in Munich at the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) annual congress.

Researchers looked at 17,710 people and compared the 25% who had the highest levels of xylitol in their blood with the 25% who had the lowest. Those with the highest amount were 57% more likely to die or suffer a heart attack or stroke than those with the lowest, within six years. Even after 30 years, they were still 18% more likely to have suffered a major cardiac event.

Taken with data from the middle quartiles, the results from both cohorts suggested a dose-dependent relationship: the higher the xylitol blood levels, the higher the cardiovascular event rate. The researchers showed there was an increase in cardiovascular events linked to xylitol irrespective of baseline characteristics, such as age and sex.

They highlighted that the association was independent of underlying factors such as body mass index, hypertension, diabetes and lipid levels.

The study's author, Dr Marco Witkowski, from the Charité university hospital in Berlin, said the results built on research that had raised concerns about xylitol. "In previous studies, we showed that xylitol can enhance the ability of platelets to form clots," he said.

> **57%**
> *The increased risk of a heart attack or death seen among people with the highest levels of xylitol*

Witkowski and his colleagues also found that high blood levels of xylitol were linked to adverse heart events in high-risk people over a three-year period. "Artificial sweeteners are consumed by people who think they are healthier than sugar and they are generally regarded as safe by regulatory agencies," he said.

"Our long-term findings in the general population highlight how little we know about the cardiovascular safety of xylitol and indicate that further studies are warranted, especially as the amount of xylitol in products continues to increase."

Prof Dan Atar, an expert member of the ESC communication committee, said: "Artificial sweeteners are widely embraced by modern society, and the safety ratings had been good and granted by regulatory authorities.

"In this observational work, however, it appears that xylitol has a negative long-term effect on cardiovascular events in the general population. As with all observational studies, causalities are difficult to infer, but this work shows that further studies are mandated into this societally important topic."

Dell Stanford, a senior dietitian at the British Heart Foundation, said: "Artificial sweeteners such as xylitol are found in many foods and drinks, and people may assume they are the healthier choice, so consume more than they realise. This study adds to growing evidence that artificial sweeteners could have an impact on our health.

"It is important to note that this was an observational study, meaning it can only show an association between higher xylitol levels and cardiovascular events, rather than proving that xylitol directly caused them, and further research is needed. But it is not a green light to have more sugar instead, as we still need to reduce our free sugar intake.

"This study is a reminder that we all need to reduce our intake of processed foods and drinks that are often high in sugar, salt or sweeteners, and focus on a balanced diet to help protect our hearts."

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'I totally related to Rotherham'

The day Dolly came to town

▶ *Dolly Parton in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, in 2007 to open the first UK outpost of her Imagination Library, where she performed and met local health and education leaders and children. Parton died this week, aged 80*

PHOTOGRAPHS: RUI VIEIRA/PA

Esther Addley

Shane Jarman was up a ladder decorating a Christmas tree at the school where he was deputy head when he got a call asking him to come to Rotherham hospital ASAP. It was December 2007 and Jarman's wife, Claire, had given birth the previous day to their first child, a girl called Emma; all was well, he was told, but "everything would become clear when I got to the hospital".

Once there, his wife told him - somewhat unexpectedly - that they were going to meet Dolly Parton. "And literally within what felt like five minutes, there were great camera flashes, lots of noise, lots of clicking and in walked this real big bundle of energy."

As Jarman's wife handed over their tiny 2kg (4lb 6oz) baby to the country star, "all I remember is seeing Dolly Parton with my little girl's head in her hand and these great big red nails".

Was he a little nervous about the nails? "I was very nervous about the nails, to be quite honest."

Parton was in the South Yorkshire former mining and steelworking town - not principally known for its razzle-dazzle - for the British launch of the Imagination Library, the book donation scheme the musician had started in her Tennessee home of Sevier County a little over a decade earlier, and which she had been invited to extend to children in Yorkshire.

If Rotherham - or at least the gathering of local dignitaries that assembled later in a disused steelworks - was a little bemused by the singer, Parton knew places like this, and of course knew how to charm. "I gotta make sure I say your town name right - it's Rother'm?" she said, flattening the famous southern twang to something approximating flat Yorkshire vowels. "Did I get it right? I've been practising because it don't look like that on paper. In the States, anything that's h-a-m we have to say Rother-ham."

Among the torrent of tributes to the entertainer, businesswoman and philanthropist since her death on Monday, Rotherham too has been remembering the impact of a woman who for all her own glamour cared deeply about places that had little of it.

Parton may have jested when she said she'd considered buying a South Yorkshire pied-à-terre - "so you may be walking down the streets of Rotherham and see me coming out of a little cubby hole somewhere" - but her description of the post-industrial town as "a heart spot for me" was sincere, thanks to the similarities she saw to her own outsider upbringing.

"I totally related to Rotherham," she said some years later. "I know that it's out in an industrial area ... When they were making fun of me for going out there, I thought, you know what? Don't make fun of me."

The scheme ensured that every Rotherham child was posted a free book, in their own name, for each month of their life until they were five, funded partly by Parton's foundation and partly by local authorities and other funders. Deborah Bullivant, who took over leading the Rotherham Imagination Library after Parton's visit, said that despite some initial scepticism, it "changed the culture" for many.

"Some people were very suspicious: why Dolly Parton? What is this thing?" she said. But for others, "can you imagine receiving a book - from registering your child's birth, your baby in their own name receives the book every month through the letterbox? For many families who didn't really have a background in reading, it changed the culture within their homes to being more of a reading culture and embracing books and using books and sharing books."

Though the Rotherham scheme was wound up in 2015 after the council withdrew support, it would be rolled out to other places in Britain, including Doncaster, North Lincolnshire, the London borough of Southwark - "Hello Suth'rk! This is Dolly!" - and Nottingham - which even coaxed an "Ay up me duck!" from the singer.

In total, 6.3m books have given to children across the four UK nations since one-day-old Emma Jarman received the first in 2007, a copy of The Tale of Peter Rabbit, which Parton autographed for her. Globally, the figure is 300m.

Now 18, Emma will shortly be going to university to study biomedical science, "and I think, if I know Emma, [the book] will go to university with her so that she can show her friends there", said her father.

◀ *'I was nervous about the nails, to be honest ...' Parton with day-old Emma Jarman - now aged 18, above - and her parents, Shane and Claire*

Cancer care

Parton 'offered to join drug trials if that helped others'

Emma Joyce

Dolly Parton's younger sister Stella Parton has shared a moving tribute to the late singer, revealing she offered to receive experimental cancer drugs "in the hope of helping others in the future" - evidence of the kindness and generosity that extended until the end of her life.

"My sister was one of the most generous, thoughtful and kind people I've ever known," Stella wrote in a tribute shared on Facebook on Thursday. "What the world saw is exactly who she was."

Stella said Dolly, who died aged 80 on Tuesday shortly after being diagnosed with cancer, had volunteered to undergo experimental medical treatments to help future cancer patients.

Stella wrote: "She told me recently that if there was no hope for her, she would still allow her medical team to try experimental drugs in the hope of helping others in the future. My sister was always thinking of others."

Stella, one of Dolly's 11 siblings and also a country music singer-songwriter, added that if fans wanted to honour the country music star's legacy, they should "show more kindness, lift others up and give more of your time and resources as she continued to do to the very end".

Dolly was taken to the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center in Nashville following kidney and autoimmune issues and died surrounded by family. "If anyone gets to heaven I'm sure she made it right on time," Stella wrote. "I know she's showing out big time, in all her sparkles and shine." She said the sisters had a coffee date over the phone every Tuesday "before the sun came up". "My Tuesday morning coffee time will never be the same but her love, respect and goodness will remain," Stella wrote. "She left the world a better place by being in it so let's follow her example."

In 2016 Dolly said that she had a happy childhood despite being raised with so many siblings in a one-room cabin in Tennessee. "There was plenty of teasing and fighting but we were all in it together."

At least 93,000 'in great need' as road damage hinders rescue efforts

Hannah Ellis-Petersen *Bidur*
Sam Jones

The Red Cross has said at least 93,000 people may have been affected by Wednesday's flash floods on the Nepal-Tibet border, which have killed nearly 600 people, left another 1,900 missing, and triggered a huge rescue operation that is being hampered by fears of new flooding.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the world's largest humanitarian network, said it feared the death toll would continue to rise as some of the hardest-hit areas remained inaccessible after roads and bridges were destroyed by the torrents.

"The trauma of this event is enormous," David Fisher, the IFRC head of delegation for Nepal, said yesterday.

"Thousands of homes have been destroyed or suffered significant damage. We believe that at least 93,000 people have been affected and are in great need. The death toll is very high and unfortunately likely to continue to rise."

The deadly floods occurred on Wednesday morning after an enormous section of a glacier in the Himalayas broke loose and crashed on to the valley floor in Nepal's Langtang national park, unleashing a massive surge of water, mud, rock and ice that thundered down rivers and valleys. The resulting floods obliterated villages and destroyed power stations, roads and bridges.

Nepal's steep slopes and the lush valleys below are especially vulnerable to flooding and landslides, and extreme weather events such as intense monsoons and melting glaciers have become more common because of warming due to human-caused climate breakdown.

"The damage is just incredible," Lila Pieters Yahia, the UN resident coordinator for Nepal, said yesterday, adding that more than 40 bridges had been destroyed or badly damaged and "over 40km [25 miles] of road completely destroyed".

By yesterday afternoon, the death toll stood at 584 people: 579 in Nepal and five across the border in Tibet, China. Authorities in Nepal said 1,942 people were still missing, including hundreds of foreign nationals who were in the area to work, trek with guides or make a pilgrimage.

Rescue teams have reported finding bodies hundreds of miles downstream from the disaster zone in the Chitwan district of Nepal, near the Tibetan border. Dozens of injured people were taken to Kathmandu for advanced medical care and more than 100 people were rescued by Nepali army personnel in helicopters.

Rescuers were forced to suspend operations yesterday morning after a dam of debris overflowed earlier in the day, increasing the risk of further flooding. Residents in Nepal's Rasuwa district, on the border with Tibet, were seen rushing up hillsides to escape a possible surge in the river, according to witnesses.

▲ *Nepal's helicopters are the only way into many affected areas. Fears of further floods halted rescue operations early yesterday*

The Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported that a lake formed by piles of debris from the mudslide had begun overflowing yesterday, sending water towards the area where rescue teams were heading for, and forcing a brief pause in operations.

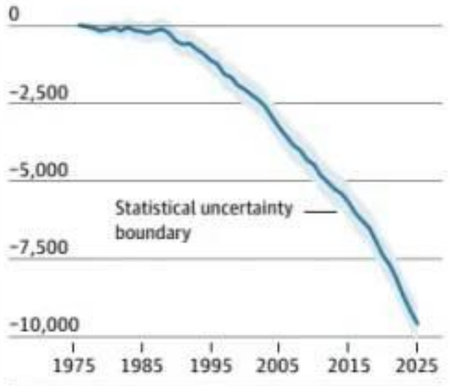
Rescue efforts in Bidur, the capital of the Nuwakot district in Bagmati province, Nepal, were disrupted yesterday morning as the Trishuli River began to rise again after the lake near the border overflowed.

Rescue workers were moved from the area and people who had tried to return to what remained of their homes were told to evacuate again immediately.

Bidur, once a bustling town on the banks of the Trishuli, now lies in ruins. Most homes were washed away when mud, rocks and debris surged down the river valley early on Wednesday. Survivors described clinging to buildings and trees as the water rushed over them.

Glaciers around the world are shrinking rapidly

Cumulative ice loss since 1976, gigatonnes of water



Source: World Glacier Monitoring Service

The mangled concrete remains of a bank, a government office and an ATM booth were among the few structures left standing, although they were submerged in mud. Officials said there were bodies inside the buildings but it was too dangerous to recover them.

Nearby, people gathered along the muddy road, calling out for lost relatives and trying to dig out what was left of their belongings.

Most areas battered by the flash floods remained accessible only by army helicopter.

At the Bidur army camp, from where much of the rescue effort was being coordinated, rescue and military helicopters flew in and out every five minutes, bringing in dozens of traumatised victims.

Many said the floods had taken their loved ones, their homes and everything they owned in a matter of minutes.

The international community is scrambling to get aid to flood-stricken parts of Nepal and Tibet.

Nepal has said it does not yet need foreign assistance as the search and rescue operation - complicated by the destruction of bridges and roads across the mountainous region - continues.

"The offer for help is natural," Lok Bahadur Chhetri, a spokesperson for Nepal's foreign ministry, said yesterday. "Our security agencies are doing the search and rescue operation. For now we don't require such help."

The Kathmandu Post reported that India, China, the US, Britain, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh had asked the government to allow their search and rescue teams to assist in the operation.

Dinesh Bhattarai, a former Nepali ambassador to the UN in Geneva, said the government's reluctance to accept foreign assistance may be linked to sensitivities over Rasuwa district and its border with Tibet.

"They may have thought about the locational sensitivity of the region and decided not to accept foreign teams," Bhattarai told Reuters.

But Chhetri said Nepal's own rescue teams were handling the operation and the decision to refuse foreign assistance had nothing to do with sensitivities.

Scant information has emerged from Chinese authorities about the scale of the destruction in Tibet, the most tightly controlled part of China even under normal circumstances. Only brief, state-controlled media reports about the floods have been allowed to circulate in China and the authorities have confirmed only five deaths there. Chinese reports have focused on rescue efforts.

Additional reporting **Agence France-Presse** *and* **Reuters**

'My husband died in the 2015 earthquake. Now this flood took my only son'

Continued *from page 1*

"Others tried to pull him to safety, but the flood swept him away," she said, tears rolling down her weathered cheeks. There was, she said, nothing left of her village now. She had spent a night sheltering on higher ground, until an army helicopter arrived and took to her safety in the army barracks. Her son, too, had been missing since the disaster, and she was waiting anxiously for news.

"Now I have nothing left to live for," said Tamang. "The whole house is gone. We couldn't salvage anything."

Yesterday, two days after the disaster, at least 579 had been confirmed dead but more than 1,900 were still missing, the numbers rising by the day. Many in Nepal fear that the true scale of the disaster has yet to emerge as the worst-hit areas in districts such as Rasuwa are accessible only by army helicopter. The situation remains even more opaque in Tibet, which is under tight Chinese control. Though it was at the centre of the disaster, Chinese authorities insist only five people there have died.

In the army barracks in the town of Bidur, where Nepal's rescue efforts were being coordinated,

▲ *Survivors at an army camp in Bidur yesterday. Many had lost relatives in a split second*

PHOTOGRAPHS: AHMER KHAN

▲ *Top, Sangke Dolma Tamang (in red), was cooking when the floods came. Above, the army barracks in Bidur, where rescue efforts are coordinated*

helicopters carrying those picked up from flooded areas continued to arrive every few minutes, while others carrying vital supplies of food and clean water flew out and high up into the mountains.

Yesterday morning, ground rescue efforts were halted over fears that the river levels were rising once again. But an army spokesperson, Gen Raja Ram Basnet, said the helicopter rescues would continue for as long as people were missing. He accepted the death toll was hard to calculate. "Right now, our focus is mostly on finding the living," he said.

Among those recently brought to safety was 60-year-old Murali Maiya Tamang, who had been in Rasuwa and was found hanging in a tree. As the flash floods came down the valley, she watched as her house was washed clean away. She convulsed with tears as she waited desperately for news of her son, who had been in their village when the floods struck and had been missing since. "My husband had already died in Nepal's 2015 earthquake," she said. "Now this flood has taken away the only son I had left. I am all alone now. What is the point of living now?"

Many in the barracks waited for news of their fathers, brothers and husbands who had been working on vast hydro-electric projects along the Bhotekoshi River, many of which had been washed away and the tunnels filled with mud. Footage yesterday showed rescuers pulling some workers to safety from within the tunnels.

A few miles from the army barracks stood the remains of the town of Bidur, on the banks of the Trishuli River. It was one of the last towns to be hit by the flash floods but it took just a few minutes for it to be reduced to mangled debris.

The ruins of a bank, a government office and an ATM booth stood still half submerged in mud. Local rescuers said there were bodies buried inside, but it was still too dangerous and the terrain too unstable to collect them.

Yesterday afternoon, Nepal's newly elected home minister, Sudan Gurung, surveyed the damage. "It is so sad to see such a heavy loss of human lives," he told the Guardian. "Our priority right now is rescuing people. We are searching for everyone who is still missing, assuming that they are all alive. We are searching for everyone, whether they are Nepali citizens or international nationals."

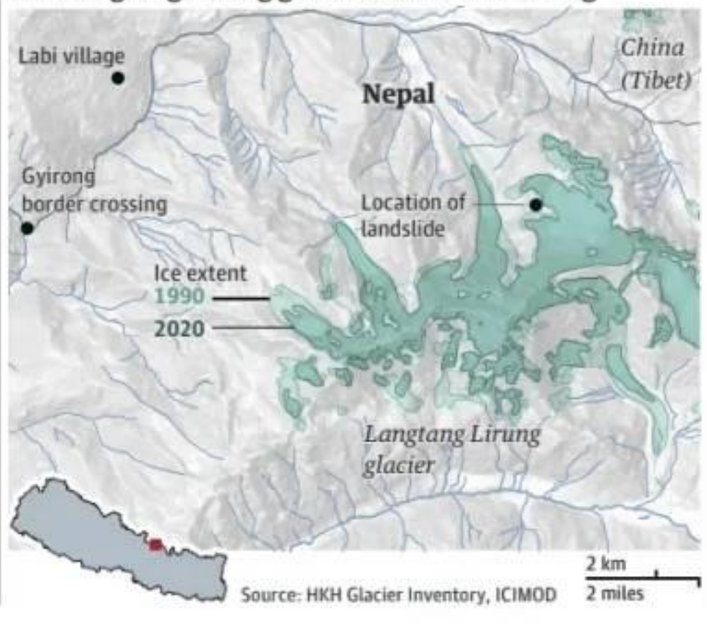
> *'We are searching for everyone still missing, assuming that they are all alive'*
>
> **Home minister**

Dozens of local people made attempts to return to the site of their homes, in an effort to collect any remnant of their lives. Most just found a deep abyss of mud.

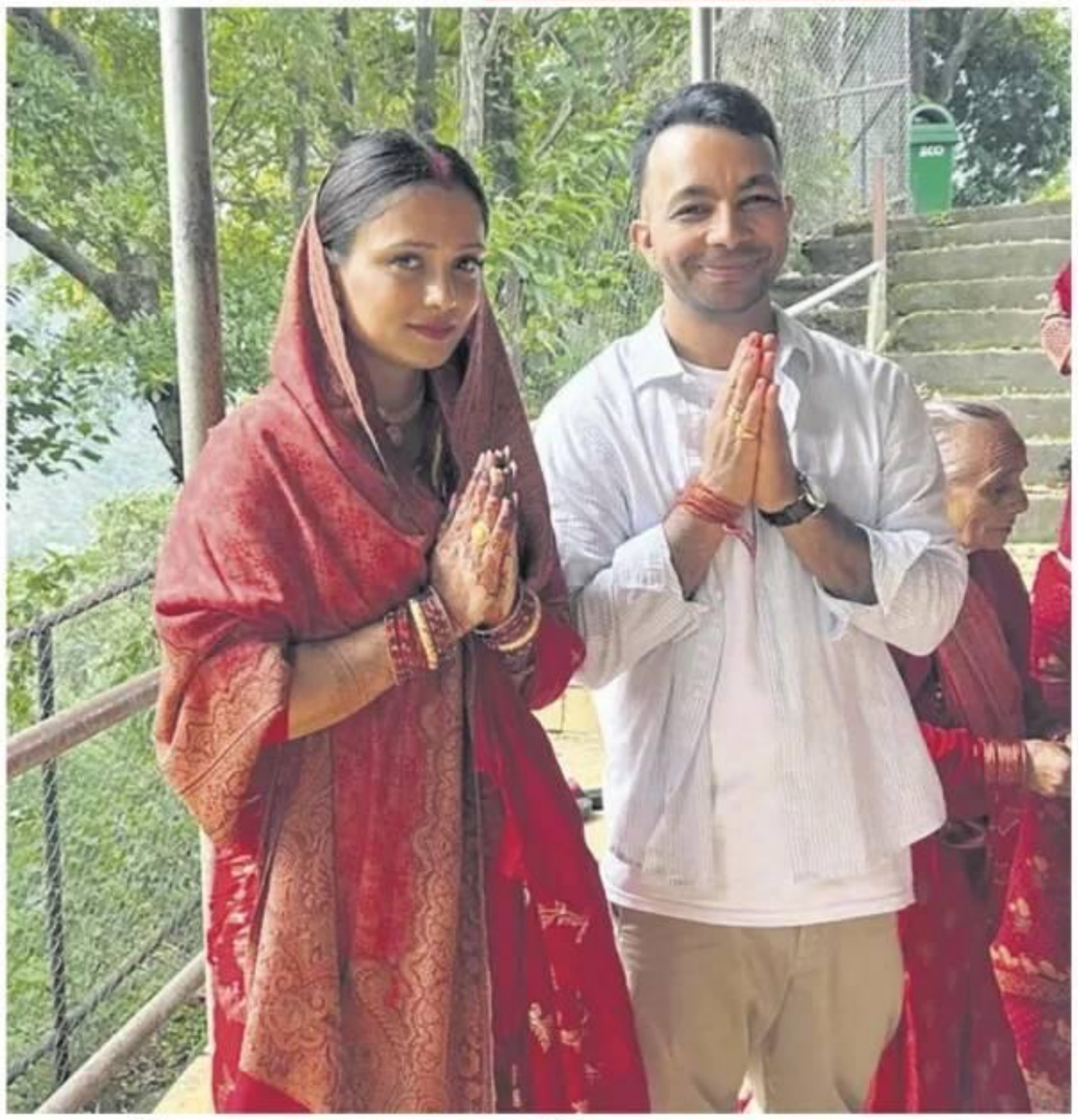
Picking through the deep mud and devastation, Ashok Chaurasia, a shopkeeper, said he had heard the terrifying roar of the water before he saw it. The dark muddy waters were already snapping at his heels as he ran uphill for safety, a bridge over the river collapsing behind him. He survived by just 20 seconds, clinging on to the wall of a monastery for dear life. His nephew and his sister-in-law were not so lucky.

As he blessed his survival, he wept at his losses. "We had a three-storey house here, and now there isn't even a single brick left," he said. "Nothing can be seen. We have nothing to eat or wear. The flood took everything I have."

The Langtang Lirung glacier has been receding



Source: HKH Glacier Inventory, ICIMOD



▼ *Missing Briton Sumitra Sapkota and her husband, Pramod Poudel. Below, nurse Sarada Simkhada*
PHOTOGRAPHS: HANDOUT/SARADA SIMKHADA

Relatives of 33 missing Britons rush to Nepal amid fears of more flooding

Rachel Hall
Nadeem Badshah

Families are rushing to Nepal to search for the 33 British nationals who are still missing, as fears mount over the risk of a second wave of flooding in the region.

Among the missing are hundreds of foreign tourists who were visiting the mountainous region, which is popular with trekkers and pilgrims for its natural beauty and religious significance.

Relatives of Britons have shared their devastation as they desperately try to reach their loved ones who were last seen in the Rasuwa district, where power and communication lines are down. Many are scrambling to book flights to Kathmandu, the Nepalese capital.

In a video on YouTube, Jaggi Vasudev, known as Sadhguru, a spiritual leader who founded the nonprofit Isha Foundation, told followers at the foundation's camp at Saga in Tibet, China, that 80 members of an Isha group returning from Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, high-altitude sites in Tibet revered by Hindus and Buddhists, were missing, including nine British people. Among them is Neetu Goyal Tiwari, 51. Her brother Naresh Goyal told the BBC completing the pilgrimage was "her dream".

Neetu's nephew, Anmol Goyal, said she had been travelling with a friend, and that her last known location was at the immigration centre on the Tibet-Nepal border. He said she had been added to the Nepali government's official list of missing persons.

Also missing are an A-level student from Surrey, Spandan Sahu, 18, and his father, Santosh Sahu, 46, the chief executive of the UK pharmaceutical technology company Charac, his mother, Surabhi Manmath Padhy, 44, and sister Syna Kumari Sahu, 13.

Mahadev Semwal, a friend of Sahu's, said: "Our heart says they are safe somewhere ... But when you see the videos, it is unbelievable."

Also confirmed missing is Sarada Simkhada, a senior nurse from Dartford, Kent, who left for Nepal last Saturday on a religious journey.

Deepesh Patel told the Press Association that his parents, Bipin Patel, 66, and Mala Patel, 60, from Coventry, were missing after flying to Nepal last Saturday for a pilgrimage.

Vikram Kolagatla, from London, told the BBC he had not heard from his wife, Geetha Reddy. Reddy, who has two daughters aged 12 and 14, had been in the Hotel Kailash in the affected area when the flooding hit.

Tatjana Phillips, from Folkestone in Kent, told the BBC she had not been able to contact her sister, Julija Jakovicka, who was attending a yoga and meditation retreat near the Nepal-Tibet border when flash flooding hit.

Tanay Ranjan told the BBC he had not heard from his older brother Ankit Ranjan, 39, or sister-in-law, Ankita Chandra, 35, who had gone on a pilgrimage.

The tour operator Alpine Eco Trek said it had been unable to make contact with a party of 12 Britons aged 13 to 65 who had booked a tour to Mount Kailash, and were in the vicinity when the flooding occurred.

Sunil Amin, from Croydon in south London, shared with the Daily Mail the "horrible, horrible feeling" of repeatedly trying to phone his wife, Hema Amin, 63, who was on a pilgrimage with Alpine Eco Trek from Nepal to Tibet with her sister.

The Trekkers' Society, which organises tours across Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, said nine UK nationals on a pilgrimage had gone missing. The organisation said they were four males, aged between 14 and 50, and five females aged 40 to 53.

The US tour firm Himalayan Glacier said it had lost contact with 47 guests and staff, including two Britons, who were also on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash.

Tour operator Kailash Journeys confirmed it had not been able to account for seven UK nationals - five women and two men aged between 18 and 55 - who were travelling with it.

Leaf Holidays, which runs Himalayan treks and expeditions from Kathmandu, wrote in a Facebook post that its group of 55 travellers remained missing, including four British citizens, Tara and Babar Gurung and Thaneswar and Tejkumari Gurung, who have not been heard from since Tuesday.

Twelve of the missing British citizens were on a tour to Mount Kailash led by Nabhi Nandan Das, 64, a Hindu priest who works at the Sanatan temple and community centre in Surrey, the Telegraph reported. He is understood to have been leading 11 Britons.

Pramod Poudel, who runs a Nepalese street food company in Uckfield, East Sussex, told the Daily Mail his wife, Sumitra, mother, Tulisa, brother Pradip and uncle Madav were all missing. His father, Purusottam, has been found alive.

The Telegraph reported that Pravin Atmakur, 54, an NHS psychiatrist, had been leading a group of 77 pilgrims on the Isha Foundation's journey to Mount Kailash. The group's last known location was an immigration centre in Timure, in the mudslide's direct path. His wife, Manjula Atmakur, arrived in Kathmandu to search for him yesterday.

Fishtail Tours and Travels confirmed Leena Bector, 53, from Slough, was among 27 travellers in its group who were unaccounted for.

Her husband, Bhupesh Bector, told the Times he was booking the next flight to Kathmandu after the Home Office had failed to confirm whether Leena was on its missing persons list. "Even if they find her today or tomorrow, I need to be there," he said.

'I had come to accept my children were no more'
Mother reunited with son, 8, who climbed trees to save himself

Zoyal Ghale, an eight-year-old boy who ran into a forest and climbed trees to escape Nepal's deadly floods, was reunited with his mother yesterday after she had begun to fear he and his brother had perished.

A day earlier, Zoyal had been airlifted alone from the devastated northern district of Rasuwa with a broken leg and cuts on his face, while his mother, Matti Maya Tamang, 28, moved from one shelter and collection point to another looking for her two missing children.

"I had come to accept that both my children were no more," Tamang told Reuters. "All I could do was weep. I couldn't hold myself together at all."

Reuters journalist Sahana Bajracharya had met Zoyal at a small hospital in neighbouring Nuwakot district. His right leg was broken and his face was scratched and bruised. In his left hand, he tightly clutched two 10-rupee notes. Police officers who had rescued him had given him the money to persuade him to go to hospital with them, officials said.

He said he had been studying at school when the flood struck and he ran into the forest with a friend and climbed into the trees.

Asked whether he had been scared, he shook his head: "No."

When Tamang arrived at the hospital, he had already been transferred to Kathmandu, but Bajracharya left her number and was able to give Tamang the good news when she called. "When you told me you knew where Zoyal was, it didn't sound real," she said. Tamang had already found her younger son alive as well.

"[Zoyal] is always a mischievous kid," Tamang said. "This is not his first broken bone." **Reuters**

▲ *Relatives check lists of patients' names outside a hospital in Kathmandu. Hundreds of foreign tourists are missing* PHOTOGRAPH: PRAKASH MATHEMA/GETTY

▲ *Pilgrims present Pope Leo with Kansas City Royals baseball mementoes* PHOTOGRAPH: SIMONE RISOLUTI/GETTY IMAGES

Infallible style wins Pope Leo high fashion praise for fun and humility

Chloe Mac Donnell

▶ *The archive image of Robert Prevost, before his elevation, in Nike trainers. It was not an AI hoax* PHOTOGRAPH: VATICAN NEWS

▲ *Sporting a White Sox cap, his home-town team, at St Peter's*

For the first time in a decade, Vanity Fair has released a best dressed list. Featuring 70 names, the list ranks the most fashionable people in the world in 2026. The line-up includes the usual suspects spanning Hollywood actors and global pop stars but nestled amongst the celebrities is a more unexpected entrant: Pope Leo XIV.

The 70 year old head of the Catholic church has been praised by the magazine for taking papal style "to heavenly heights". His most memorable look? A simple white cassock styled with a pair of Nike trainers.

Vanity Fair's style correspondent José Criales-Unzueta, who worked on compiling the list, says he and the team were impressed by the Pope's "innate Americaness with which he dresses."

The Chicago born pontiff has carved out something of a niche in papal dressing and garnered a loyal fashion following due to his enthusiasm for both bespoke vestments and vintage fashion accessories. As well as trainers, he likes simple black oxford shoes over the traditional red papal slippers.

He wears a discontinued Swiss made quartz watch, carries his own battered briefcase and last June popped a White Sox baseball cap (his favourite team) over his papal cap for a general audience in St Peter's square. For more formal occasions, he turns to the Italian designer Filippo Sorcinelli, who has also created liturgical vestments for Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

His inclusion comes at the Catholic church, with its long mastery of symbolism and optics, experiences an increase driven by gen Z. For Leo, being featured in a publication that its global editorial director, Mark Guiducci, has described as a "magazine about personalities" and that feels "like the pantheon", works well with the papacy's own aim to position itself as a modern power.

"The world's embrace of this pope has been stunning to me," said Robert Orsi, professor of religious studies at Northwestern University in Illinois. Orsi pointed to Leo's criticism of AI and calls for peace as also speaking to gen Z.

Carol Richardson, professor of early modern art history at the University of Edinburgh said the pope would be aware of his inclusion on the list. "He and the people surrounding him are very savvy. The majority will think it's fun. They will like the fact it has been noticed how busy he is, that he has to wear trainers to run around in. That he is working."

From Christian Lacroix ecclesiastical riffing in the 1980s and the Met's Heavenly Bodies exhibition in 2018 to crucifixes and depictions of Christ on the most recent catwalks, Catholicism has long fascinated fashion. Criales-Unzueta says its vastness appeals. "There is so much to take in and so much to find inspiration in."

The pontiff is listed in Vanity Fair's "originals" division, a category of individuals commended by the magazine for being "the most outlandish and innovative dressers" with "a singular point of view." Others on the list include the filmmaker Spike Lee and the singers Björk and Rosalía.

> ***'Trainers symbolise a readiness to move to where he is needed'***
>
> **Robert Orsi**
> *Church studies academic*

Criales-Unzueta described the list as "an opportunity to showcase the way fashion and style are deeply embedded in culture and society" and that "style, good style, is a practice that is not reserved for celebrities or their stylists".

When Leo was first spotted last May wearing Nike trainers in a still from Leone a Roma, a Vatican produced documentary that retraces his time in Rome before he became pope, it instantly went viral.

Many people assumed the image was a fake. It was compared to the AI-generated image of Pope Francis wearing an oversized Balenciaga puffer jacket that has since been described as "the first real mass-level AI misinformation case".

Criales-Unzueta says that was the moment Leo became "a talking point in and outside fashion".

Trainer fans were quick to identify Leo's Nike pair as a discontinued retro tennis style shoe that were first sold in the 1970s. "What a papal flex" declared Esquire while some online users were quick to christen his style as "Holy Drip".

By the end of last year, Leo found himself featured alongside A$AP Rocky and Bad Bunny in Vogue's best dressed list while the New York Times named him as one of its 67 Most Stylish People of 2025.

Orsi says he has been thinking about what the trainers symbolise. "A sportiness? A familiarity with track and field, basket-ball courts, running?" he ponders.

For him it is "a lightness on his feet, a readiness to move quickly to where he is needed the most", he says. "They signal that he is approachable, like a good coach, and also humble."

ADHD and autism service costs 'out of control', NHS leaders say

Jamie Grierson

NHS leaders have warned that the costs of meeting soaring demand for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism services in England are "running out of control" and have become unsustainable, with spending in some areas rising by as much as tenfold over the course of a year.

The NHS Alliance, which represents health managers, said the rise in demand since the coronavirus pandemic was forcing some to close waiting lists and look at reining in other services they provide.

One integrated care board (ICB) cited in a report said its monthly spending had risen from £146,000 in 2024-25 to £1.5m last year. Another said spending on adult ADHD services had risen from £11m in 2023-24 to a projected £51m this financial year.

Increased demand and a lack of NHS capacity have led to a big influx of new providers, the report said, fuelled by patients' right to choose, which allows people seeking a diagnosis for themselves or a child to opt for any qualified provider.

One ICB told the NHS Alliance it now had 80 providers on its patch. Another said that two years ago it had received invoices from 12 to 14 providers, a figure that had risen to 48.

The rapid expansion of new providers has also prompted concerns from ICBs about quality assurance and regulation, the report said. This is a particular concern when large numbers of small, non-regulated providers that are able to deliver assessments but not continuing care enter the market.

This increased capacity has helped to ease some delays for assessments, but - owing to the lack of a national tariff - has resulted in huge variations in the prices paid for services, adding to already severe cost pressures, the report said. One ICB told the NHS Alliance it was paying £300 to £3,000 for similar services.

Rebecca Gray, the director of the NHS Alliance's mental health network, said: "Local health leaders are caught between a rock and a hard place.

"They understand the anguish and frustration caused by long delays in the system as people wait for assessments, treatment and support. But in working to meet rising demand they face soaring costs that are running out of control.

"As commissioners they must balance their budgets. Unplanned overspends on ADHD and autism assessments and treatment can impact on other activities and disrupt long-term planning.

"The current situation is unsustainable and delivers a bad deal for patients and taxpayers."

The NHS Alliance is calling for a national mandatory price, or tariff, for ADHD and autism services and a national service specification applied consistently across all NHS-funded providers.

Farmers call for UK to block Brazilian meat as EU imposes antibiotic safety ban

Fiona Harvey
Environment editor

Britain's leading farming organisations and animal health experts have called for an urgent ban on imports of Brazilian meat, in light of concerns over the safety of non-UK foodstuffs.

The National Farmers' Union (NFU) in England and its sister organisations in the devolved administrations wrote to the government yesterday warning that public health was at risk.

Brazilian cattle and poultry are feared to be frequently reared with the routine use of antibiotics, after Brazil failed to demonstrate compliance with EU rules on the issue, despite a tightening of some regulations by the Brazilian government.

The overuse of antibiotics in farming is a leading cause of the growth of superbugs, which are resistant to antibiotic medicines critical for human health.

Next week, the EU will ban imports of Brazilian beef and chicken over the same concerns, but Brexit means Britain need not follow suit. Imports to the UK from Brazil have risen strongly since Brexit, from about £3bn in 2021 to £5bn in 2025, of which meat is a big component. In 2024 Brazil accounted for about an eighth of Britain's chicken imports.

Farmers, who are already concerned about falling meat prices while input prices for feed and energy have risen, fear that with the closure of the EU market to Brazilian meat exports, more produce will be diverted to Britain.

Although Brazil has moved to restrict the routine use of antibiotics on farms, an investigation published last year by the Irish Farmers Journal and the Irish Farmers' Association found that Brazilian growers had easy access to antibiotics classified as highest-priority critically important for human medicine, without a veterinary prescription, and that traceability rules were not being applied.

Cóilín Nunan, of the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics, said: "The rise of antibiotic resistance is a global health crisis. Each year it is directly responsible for about 1.14 million deaths and associated with 4.71 million deaths.

"We know that resistant pathogens can spread internationally on food. So why are we still importing meat from countries like Brazil that are allowing the irresponsible use on intensive farms of even the most critically important antibiotics?"

Tom Bradshaw, president of the NFU, met Angela Eagle, secretary of state for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in July to demand a ban, but the government has so far refused one.

A spokesperson for Defra said: "Our experts have sought urgent information and assurances from Brazil as part of a rapid assessment of beef and poultry production systems to ensure our high food and animal welfare standards are being met, while closely monitoring market impacts of the EU ban. This government will always act to protect our farmers and the public with our world-leading robust import controls which are in place to protect animal and public health."

In their letter to Eagle, the farming union presidents said: "Ensuring the health and safety of the nation is a core responsibility of any government and the UK has long recognised the risks posed by AMR [antimicrobial resistance]. UK farmers have worked hard to cut antibiotic use and maintain some of the highest production standards in the world - we should demand the same of our imported food."

The government is already under pressure on food safety, following an outbreak of salmonella in imported eggs that killed at least one person and caused more than 200 people to become sick this month.

▲ *Sales of beans, lentils and soya bean derivatives such as tofu rose by 7.3% in the first half of this year*
PHOTOGRAPH: NATASHA ALIPOUR FARIDANI/GETTY

Finger on the pulse: shoppers buy beans as meat sales fall

Sarah Butler

British shoppers are eating more beans, lentils, tofu and tempeh - while cutting back on real and fake meat - to save money and improve their diet.

The quantity of beans, pulses and soya bean derivatives sold in the UK increased by 7.3% in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period last year, led by a 23% surge in cheap dried lentils, according to analysis of data from the market research firm NielsenIQ by the climate campaign group Madre Brava.

Shoppers turned to more upmarket legumes, including organic and jarred varieties, and sales of canned and jarred butter beans were up by 30.3%.

That growth was partly driven by new products and brands such as the Bold Bean Co, El Navarrico and Marks & Spencer's own-label, as well as recipes going viral on social media.

Baked beans, once the titans of the supermarket tinned section, initially appeared to have become has-beens in the frenzy, with 1.2% fewer cans sold - but the decline is actually owing to a drop in cans also containing sausages.

Fake meats, once seen as the future of vegetarian and vegan diets, also continue to fall out of favour, with 4.3% fewer packages sold. The decline was down to sales of textured soya, pea and wheat protein products, which offset renewed growth in mycoprotein - sold under the brand name Quorn.

"Shoppers are not abandoning plant proteins - they're shifting toward simpler, higher-fibre foods, whose prices are rising more slowly than food inflation, widening the price gap with meat," the Madre Brava report said. "This indicates that, while food inflation and affordability remain key factors, nutrition and health benefits are also driving purchasing decisions," it said.

▲ *Shoppers are turning to simple, high-fibre foods, a report has said*

Amid high inflation of meat prices, especially for beef and lamb, in recent years the amount sold by retailers fell by 1.8% year on year according to Madre Brava's analysis of Euromonitor International data.

The evidence of changing diets comes after the launch of the Bang in Some Beans campaign last year, led by celebrity chefs including Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and by supermarkets, which aimed to double UK bean consumption by 2028.

That steps up a longer-term push by campaigners for people to include more legumes in their diets.

Chloe MacKean, the food business transformation manager at the Food Foundation, said: "[Beans] are a healthy and affordable protein source, high in fibre and emit far fewer greenhouse gas emissions than animal protein." She said large food companies were also aware of the commercial opportunities of beans and 29 companies including Sainsbury's, Lidl GB, M&S, Subway and Harvester had all made commitments through the Bang in Some Beans campaign to sell more.

Cue acrimony: Sheffield snooker fans balk at 'zombie' mural

Jamie Grierson

A street artist has defended his mural of the snooker player Ronnie O'Sullivan in Sheffield after critics suggested the world champion looked like a zombie.

Chris Ashmore was commissioned to produce the artwork featuring the seven-time world champion for the back wall of the Spot On Snooker Club, the BBC reported.

▲ *The mural of Ronnie O'Sullivan, unfinished, according to the artist*

Many residents have reportedly said they like the mural, others suggested O'Sullivan was "zombie-like" or "skeletal", and others told the broadcaster the artwork was "shocking".

Ashmore said he had only completed two weeks of the five assigned to the job, and "touch-ups" were still forthcoming.

"I usually use a scissor lift, where you can stand back and see things as a whole, but I couldn't use it as the land is too uneven," he told the BBC.

"When the scaffolding came down, I came away and boom - it's gone viral. I saw people saying it looks like Michael Jackson or a zombie. I've got thick skin, I'll be OK, but it didn't feel fair."

Gillian Jones, who lives near the mural told the broadcaster she liked it and it "brightened her day".

Glen Bridock, a fan of the West-Midlands-born snooker player, said the design looked "brilliant".

But Frank Short said: "The artwork is OK, but the eyes are all wrong. It looks like he's taken something."

Shaun Spalding said the mural was "shocking". "His eyes are all wrong, his teeth are wrong, it just don't look like Ronnie. It looks like somebody who's got a skeletal face."

Dan Kirkland, the manager of the snooker club, defended Ashmore's work.

"Yes, we've seen what you've seen. There are parts of the face that need tweaking, particularly around the eyes and mouth.

"Some relatively small changes will make a huge difference, so we'll arrange whatever access Chris needs.

"What has upset us is seeing some of the reactions becoming personal towards Chris.

"People are absolutely entitled to like or dislike a mural. But having an opinion about a piece of artwork is one thing. Slagging off the person who created it is another."

Older women in arts report lack of roles and age discrimination

Rachel Hall

Women working in the arts believe they do not have equal opportunities for roles, especially as they get older, according to a report warning that the industry is fixated with "young and emerging" talent.

Nearly all (95%) women working in the arts believe gender inequality persists and three-quarters (75%) have experienced unconscious bias or sexism, according to a survey of 76 arts professionals. More than two-thirds (69%) feel that age negatively affects their career success, a figure that rises to 100% for those working in artistic rather than managerial roles.

The research warns that gender discrimination and ageism are being exacerbated by the use of AI in hiring, which can penalise women for taking career breaks for caring responsibilities, or reinforce historical biases in hiring. Many performers highlighted the additional pressure on women to look young relative to men. "Often younger actresses are cast to play opposite men who are older for parts that are supposed to be the same age," said one actor.

One participant said that casting opportunities "drop off at 39", while an actor said "there are twice as many roles for my male colleagues as there are for me. There are even fewer roles for actresses over 50."

One respondent highlighted the obsession with words such as "young and emerging" to describe talent. "There seems to be absolutely no celebration of experienced, seasoned, insightful, adult, et cetera. It's always 'fresh'. As if anything that isn't fresh is mouldy," she said. Another pointed out that writers' schemes tend to favour young people, while many emerging artist initiatives are aimed at young, graduating artists rather than developing older artists.

▲ *Actor Maureen Beattie says more 'meaty' roles for women are needed*

One person working in arts marketing said there was a prevalent idea that only young people truly understood the online world, while a writer said that the stories of older women were seldom commissioned.

The theatre and TV actor Maureen Beattie, who starred in Casualty and was a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, said: "So, we have proof at last that age discrimination is one of the major issues women face in the entertainment industry. Are we surprised? I'm certainly not. I'm one of the lucky ones who have slipped through this particular net and at the ripe old age of 72 have just come back from playing Lear in Pitlochry.

"We need far more of these great big meaty roles for women so the current waste of the great talent and life knowledge and technical skill older women bring to the table doesn't go on disappearing into the night."

Dr Jennifer Tuckett, who authored the report, said: "The findings regarding age discrimination against older women in the arts, and the potential for AI to increase issues for older women in the arts, are particularly worrying."

The findings emerged from a survey undertaken as part of a research project on women in the arts. It is funded by Arts Council England. A spokesperson for ACE said it would "consider the challenges women face around issues such as glass ceilings, harassment and caring responsibilities", with a view to identifying good practice and interventions that support women at work.

The report calls for more targeted work to address gender discrimination, including more funding, representation targets and leadership programmes, as well as algorithm audits to minimise bias.

Actors back campaign warning of risk posed by AI voice cloning

Jamie Grierson

Nicola Coughlan, Hugh Bonneville and Matt Lucas are among a group of actors backing a campaign against artificial intelligence voice cloning.

Save Our Voices Now, which is also being supported by Luke Evans, Jen Brister, Siobhán McSweeney and Pearl Mackie, aims to stop the practice in which AI technology is used to replicate a real person's voice to say anything it is prompted to.

Bonneville, the star of Paddington and Downton Abbey, said: "My voice is unique, it's mine, it's part of my identity. So is yours. That's worth speaking up about."

About 80 people have added their signatures to an open letter to the prime minister, Andy Burnham, and a Gov.uk petition has been launched to ask for everyone in Britain to be given ownership of their voice as part of their statutory rights.

The Derry Girls actor McSweeney said: "I'm deeply worried that legislation, contracts, working practices and ethics, and artists' rights are not being considered or protected as quickly as AI technology is progressing.

"I believe that there is a way to work alongside AI and to use it as a tool that benefits us rather than rendering us obsolete. This is an existential problem and needs to be controlled legislatively as soon as possible. My voice is one of my tools.

PHOTOGRAPH: JED CULLEN/GETTY FOR BRITISH VOGUE

"In order to adapt and move with technological advances, I don't see why we should remove the human from the equation. Our audiences want that human connection. Not AI," McSweeney said.

The campaign says that 28% of UK adults report they have been targeted by a voice-cloning scam.

The founder of Save Our Voices Now, Peter Caulfield, said: "In just three seconds, with the right AI system, your voice can be cloned, stolen and reinterpreted without your knowledge. It's a Black Mirror episode, except this isn't fiction. It's happening right now.

"The bottom line is the government is allowing AI companies to steal and profit from artists' voices without their consent.

"They are also allowing criminals to use AI to clone people's identities and threaten everyone. We need to use our real voices now to stop it."

◀ *Siobhán McSweeney, Jen Brister (top right) and Hugh Bonneville are among those backing the Save Our Voices Now campaign*

In Denmark, legal reforms are taking place to give its citizens ownership over their face, body and voice, allowing them to demand removal of unauthorised AI content and seek compensation.

Salmonella cases likely to continue rising until source of outbreak found

Tobi Thomas
Health and inequalities correspondent

Salmonella cases in the UK are expected to rise until the common source is identified, something that is notoriously difficult to establish, experts have said.

There have been 474 confirmed cases and one death linked to the current outbreak, according to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), with an investigations suggesting it is associated with eating imported eggs in cafes and restaurants.

About 1.6bn eggs are imported to the UK every year, according to the British Egg Industry Council, with the number having risen 60% since 2021.

The link to eggs consumed outside the home is consistent with imported eggs commonly being used in catering, according to Prof Paul Wigley, professor of animal microbial ecosystems at the University of Bristol.

Wigley said: "Bought in bulk these eggs are cheaper than UK lion mark eggs and so can end up being used in schools and nursing homes along with cafes, restaurants and takeaways. The eggs may be mixed batches from different batches, but the clustering of cases suggests there may be a single source."

He added: "Avoiding runny eggs outside the home, unless lion mark eggs, is perhaps the only step an individual can make."

Although previous salmonella outbreaks in the UK have been linked to eggs imported from European countries such as Poland, the current source of this outbreak has yet to be identified. For some experts, this makes the current surge in cases particularly worrying.

Prof Chris Elliott of the School of Biological Sciences at Queen's University Belfast, said: "All we have been told is that the likelihood is that it's been imported.

"There is a huge amount of difficulty in tracing the origins of something like this."

He added that the number of cases would keep rising until the source was identified, which could take "not days, but weeks".

Elliott added: "My expectation is those numbers will continue to rise until they can not only track the source, but right back to the country of production.

"It is fiendishly difficult to track the source of a food and ingredient, so I certainly wouldn't be critical of the agencies.

Prof Mark Stevens, the chair of microbial pathogenesis at the University of Edinburgh, said the outbreak was also unusual because cases were occurring at the same time. He said: "There are thousands of salmonella cases each year, but rarely are they on this scale."

Moscow losing more troops than it can recruit, say western officials

Peter Walker
Senior political correspondent

Russia's military is losing about 6,000 more troops in Ukraine each month than it can recruit, according to western officials.

While Moscow is still acquiring battlefield recruits at speed – at an estimated rate of 1,000 a day over the past two months – even this has not been sufficient to replace the killed or wounded.

"We estimate that the gap between the number of people Russia is losing to casualties and the number they are being able to recruit is around 6,000 a month at the moment," one western official said.

"Vladimir Putin's response to this has been to escalate himself and to target civilian infrastructure and civilians in Ukraine, firing over 360 missiles since early July and exploiting Kyiv's shortage of defence against ballistic missiles. It's clear that Moscow intends to try to break Ukrainian morale by destroying its energy infrastructure this winter."

The tactics are being deployed in part because Putin has limited options for overcoming the huge losses on the battlefield.

Western officials believe further mobilisation would be a big risk politically and economically. The last such event, in autumn 2022, saw about a million, often highly skilled, Russians leave the country, with less than half returning. It is also unclear whether the Russian military could absorb the several hundred thousand recruits that would result, given a lack of equipment and officers.

Ukraine has repeatedly attacked Russian targets connected to oil, creating fuel shortages, but has appealed repeatedly for more help from allies, both with offensive missiles and defence systems.

Andy Burnham visited Kyiv on his first overseas trip as prime minister this week. He told President Volodymyr Zelenskyy the UK would give Ukraine previously classified information on the British-manufactured components for long-range cruise missiles.

Burnham also urged the international community to do more to protect Ukraine against Russian attacks, particularly with more US-made Patriot interceptor missiles.

He is expected to make this argument at next month's UN general assembly in New York.

In response, Russia has made repeated threats of retaliation, including talk of attacks on UK military sites inside and outside Ukraine. The western officials said that while the threat from Russia remained very real, the situation had not changed, and the assessment was that "Putin absolutely wants to avoid a direct confrontation with Nato".

One official said: "We are seeing a continuation of hostile rhetoric and various accusations against the UK.

"This is absolutely consistent with longstanding Russian military doctrine, which is to use rhetoric to both exploit fears in adversaries and to influence decision-making. So this is not a new phenomenon."

Officials say Moscow still has the capability to target the UK, with cyber-attacks or physical attacks by proxies on civilian targets, including factories and warehouses. Last year, six men were jailed over an attack ordered by Russia on a London warehouse housing aid for Ukraine.

Putin's overall aim in Ukraine, western officials believe, is to maintain a campaign of attrition, hoping that support from Ukraine's allies will ebb away, particularly if governments are spooked by public alarm over the Russian leader's threats.

Such threats should be seen, one official said, as attempts "to create an additional, fractured and more vulnerable Europe".

Another said: "It's important to keep in mind that this is not new. Russia has invoked the threat of the possible use of nuclear weapons numerous times in recent years to try to scare us into ending support for Ukraine."

◀ *Fire engulfs a shopping mall in Zaporizhzhia after a Russian missile attack yesterday. Ukraine has appealed for help with its air defences*

PHOTOGRAPH: DARYA NAZAROVA/GETTY

A tight spot Burnham faces tricky first budget to fund political change

Jessica Elgot
Deputy political editor

When Andy Burnham made his first speech after returning as an MP, he promised that as prime minister he would oversee "the most significant change moment in our politics for 40 years". His style, direction and communication has been a big shift from Keir Starmer's approach but, as he heads into the autumn, he is constrained by similar problems. With a budget in late October, and worsening economic circumstances, Burnham has made promises and commitments that put him in a tight spot. Here are some of the constraints he and the chancellor, John Healey, must square.

Fiscal rules

The biggest risk of Burnham as prime minister was always whether he would spook the bond markets and set in train a Liz Truss-style meltdown. Starmer's allies often played up this fear so Burnham had to ensure that markets knew he was a serious operator. Gilt yields rose after an interview last year in which he said the government was "in hock to the bond markets".

So Burnham has committed to Rachel Reeves's fiscal rules on debt and borrowing, though he has indicated he will "use, obviously, any flexibility within them" where he can borrow to fund investment.

Tax rises

Burnham has said he will "stick to the manifesto", which promises no increases in income tax, national insurance or VAT, though he cautioned in an interview this week that the public needed to be "realistic" about what had to be funded and how difficult more spending would be. That decision to stick to no rises in personal taxation had left businesses fearing a tax raid – and Burnham has been urged by some leftwing figures and union leaders to consider further wealth taxes. But the prime minister told the FT this week he was loth to do more to increase the costs of doing business and did not want to target "wealth creators".

Economic turmoil

Reeves left £23.6bn of "headroom" in her last budget, which gives Healey a buffer to meet the fiscal rule of balancing day-to-day spending with receipts. But the Iran war and subsequent rises in inflation and borrowing costs for servicing Britain's £2.9tn national debt are likely to have dented that headroom. Treasury sources say the impact may not be as much as feared, but the strait of Hormuz remains closed, growth is sluggish and inflation is creeping upwards.

Cost of living

Burnham has made several popular

▼ *Andy Burnham, work secretary Pat McFadden and London mayor Sadiq Khan on a supermarket visit*
PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON DAWSON/NO 10 DOWNING ST

early interventions to help ease the cost of living – including some, such as cutting VAT on energy bills, that are ostensibly funded by cutting existing programmes.

Healey has suggested there are no further plans to offer energy support before the price cap rises by 4% in October, which will wipe out the impact of the VAT cut.

The Treasury will want a contingency plan in place in case more help is needed in January. The Resolution Foundation suggested that even a targeted scheme for those earning less than £25,000 would cost about £2bn.

Defence

The Treasury confirmed yesterday that it would delay setting out when the UK would meet the target of spending 3% of GDP on defence until next year's spending review.

Burnham would have had to find an additional £4.7bn over five years for defence in October's budget, after Starmer announced £15bn extra when he published the defence investment plan, without saying where the cash would come from.

The remaining £10.3bn will also have to be raised by "reallocating budget" from across government departments. Labour has committed to spending 3.5% of GDP on defence by the middle of the next decade. But there will be endless pressure to go faster.

Public control

Burnham promised he wanted to place life's essentials "back under public control" – specifically Thames Water. In June, he said he favoured public ownership for Thames Water, which is struggling with a £20bn debt.

Burnham told the FT that he had intentionally spoken in terms of more public control rather than nationalisation, but the budget is his first opportunity to set out a direction of travel that goes beyond local control of bus routes.

Welfare

Two major reviews will report this autumn: one is the second part of the Timms review, which will look at a new system to deliver personal independence payments to disabled people, where the bill is increasing substantially.

The other is the Milburn review of youth unemployment and inactivity – also likely to require significant spending.

The Telegraph reported that Burnham was likely to push the issue of welfare into the new year.

Assisted dying
PM to abstain to ensure free vote by MPs

Peter Walker

Andy Burnham has told Labour MPs that he will not cast a vote when the assisted dying bill returns to the Commons next month to avoid influencing the debate.

While the move was welcomed by supporters of the measure, No 10 officials say the prime minister has no wish to affect the process in either direction, and is just doing what he thinks is best to allow MPs to reach their own collective view.

In a separate letter to his ministers yesterday, Burnham warned them against trying to influence the process. When an earlier version of the bill was before parliament in 2025, Wes Streeting, the then health secretary, voiced worries about its impact on the NHS.

An original version of the private member's bill to permit assisted dying in limited circumstances in England and Wales, led by the Labour MP Kim Leadbeater, ran out of time in the last parliament after peers tabled 1,200 amendments.

Another Labour MP, Lauren Edwards, has tabled a near-identical version to allow adults with less than six months to live to apply for an assisted death, subject to the approval of two doctors and an expert panel. It has its second reading in the Commons – the first opportunity that MPs get to vote on a bill – on 11 September.

▲ *Protesters as the assisted dying bill was debated in the House of Commons in 2025*
PHOTOGRAPH: WIKTOR SZYMANOWICZ/GETTY

Keir Starmer voted for Leadbeater's bill as prime minister on its second and third readings, while otherwise remaining neutral on an issue seen as a matter of conscience, and where MPs were given a free vote by their parties. Burnham said he was taking a different approach.

"The government remains neutral on the question of assisted dying and on the passage of the bill," he said, saying it was "vital that every view is respected".

Burnham wrote: "There is no single right position and I have deep respect for MPs on all sides, and the expertise they bring to this debate."

Saying he had "my own personal views", Burnham went on: "I am also clear that this is a matter for parliament to decide and my role, as the prime minister, will be to lead a government that implements the will of parliament in this area – whether that is to change the law or not.

"I also do not want to unduly influence the debate as prime minister and for every colleague to know it is a genuinely free vote. For these reasons, I have taken the decision that it is most appropriate for me not to vote at second reading," he wrote.

As Greater Manchester mayor, Burnham said he supported the idea in principle. But in July, he said it would be "very challenging" to introduce the change before palliative care and social care were improved.

Supporters of the bill argue that, with a proposed implementation period of up to four years, there is time for this to happen.

Burnham confirmed that, as is the convention for issues involving conscience, collective responsibility would be again set aside, with frontbenchers free to vote or abstain.

MPs should be "able to reach those conclusions without feeling that the government is seeking to influence the debate", he wrote, adding: "At the dispatch box, I ask that ministers reiterate that this is a question for parliament, on which the official government position is to remain neutral, with the same approach taken outside parliament when dealing with all forms of media, including social media."

Defence
Healey delays timeline to hit spending goal

Heather Stewart
Lauren Almeida

The chancellor will delay setting out when the UK will meet the target of allocating 3% of GDP on defence until next year's spending review, the Treasury has confirmed.

John Healey resigned as defence secretary in June under Keir Starmer's leadership, accusing the prime minister of being "unable" and the Treasury "unwilling" to "commit the resources that the nation needs to defend the country".

However, since succeeding Rachel Reeves following Andy Burnham's arrival at No 10, Healey has declined to set a date for meeting the 3% target, which he had previously insisted should be reached by 2030.

Treasury sources confirmed that instead, the focus in Healey's first budget on 28 October would be fully funding the defence investment plan. The three-year DIP was one of Starmer's final announcements – but about £1.2bn a year was left unaccounted for, with Reeves suggesting the money would have to be found through cuts in other Whitehall departments.

The Treasury confirmed yesterday that there would be no further detail about the timeline in the budget. A spending review is expected to be held next year but no date for it has yet been set.

A government spokesperson said: "The first duty of government is to keep its citizens safe.

"The prime minister and chancellor are committed to fully funding the defence investment plan. At the spending review we will set out a pathway to meet our Nato commitment of 3.5% of GDP on defence by 2035 and will set a target date to hit 3% on that path."

▲ *John Healey has said 3% of the UK's GDP should be spent on defence*

Defence spending is on track to reach 2.7% of GDP by 2030, funded partly by Starmer's decision to cut the UK's aid spending.

Healey had previously said that this figure should rise to 3% urgently, given the growing global conflicts and security risks. He wrote in his resignation letter to Starmer in June: "As we have regularly discussed, I am certain that a headmark date for 3% of GDP on defence in 2030 is what Britain must set."

So far, Burnham, has refused to commit to the 3% target.

In an interview with Sky News yesterday, Healey said fiscal discipline was the "first priority" for any chancellor. "It's the bedrock for economic stability," he said. "We simply can't deal with the problems we face as a country by maxing out the country's credit card."

The chancellor will fly to North Carolina this weekend for a meeting of G20 finance ministers, chaired by the US Treasury secretary, Scott Bessent.

Healey and his colleagues will discuss the prospects for global growth, against the backdrop of continued high energy prices, volatile government bond markets and the US-Canada trade war.

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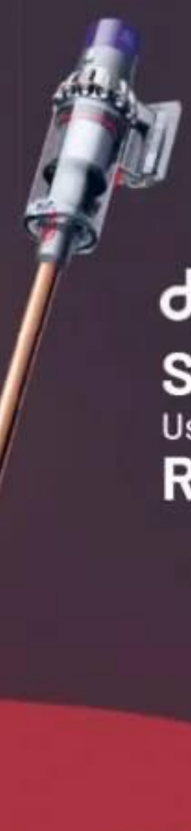

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South West Water worst for the environment in England

Pippa Neill
Environment reporter

South West Water is doing more harm to the environment than any other water company in England, according to new analysis, with more sewage discharged in Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset than anywhere else.

Friends of the Earth analysed water companies' environmental performance in six categories: sewage spills, water quality at bathing sites, pollution incidents or warnings at bathing sites, severity of sewage pollution at bathing sites, the percentage of rivers rated below the standard for good ecological health and the affordability of bills.

South West Water, which operates across Devon, Cornwall and parts of Dorset and Somerset, was among the top three worst performers in four out of the six categories.

The water company had the highest total duration of sewage spill events since 2024, averaging 574,323 hours annually. Severn Trent and Yorkshire Water came second and third respectively but were outstripped by South West Water, by almost 200,000 spill hours.

South West Water's designated bathing sites also recorded the most pollution incidents and warnings, with 666 recorded in 2025 alone.

There are 157 official bathing sites in South West Water's catchment. If a site is designated, the Environment Agency will monitor water quality during the bathing season to protect people's health.

A spokesperson for the company said: "We manage more than a third of England's designated bathing waters, so improving water quality is a huge priority for us. We're already seeing progress, with storm overflow spills down 17% and spill duration down 25% over the past year, despite significantly higher rainfall across the region. We're also on track to meet new Environment Act bathing water standards by 2030, five years ahead of the national deadline, showing the impact of record investment across the south-west."

Alongside this poor environmental performance, Friends of the Earth said South West Water's roughly 1.8 million customers faced some of the highest water bills at £726 annually. Since 2024, they have had the second biggest increase in England, with bills rising by 39%.

Southern Water is responsible for the most expensive water bills in England and the biggest increase since 2024, with £281 added to the average bill in that period.

Kierra Box, a water campaigner at Friends of the Earth, is calling on the government to bring forward a robust clean water bill that sets out a "meaningful plan for restoring the health of the UK's rivers and seas".

She said: "People have had enough of hearing ministers say they'll fix the problem, only to bring in measures that superficially address the issue. If we're to end the sewage scandal once and for all, we must see the government committing to a complete overhaul of our water system."

A Defra spokesperson said: "The government recognises that we need to build on our reforms which banned bonuses so our water system works for the public. That's why we are driving forward the biggest overhaul of the water sector in a generation, with new legislation to give the public more control and help keep bills as low as possible."

574,323
The annual average duration of sewage spill events by South West Water since 2024

£726
Annual bills paid by 1.8 million customers of South West Water, after a 39% increase since 2024

Friends of the Earth is also calling on the government to nationalise water companies. Sources recently told the Guardian that the prime minister, Andy Burnham, was considering ripping up insolvency laws to make it easier to bring utilities under public control. However, the Times reported that Burnham had shelved plans to put Thames Water into administration amid concerns about the cost and the legal risk involved.

Defra said Thames Water remained financially stable, but the government stood "ready for all eventualities, including applying for a special administration regime".

Water UK said: "No sewage spill is ever acceptable, and we are working to end them ... we are tripling investment over the next five years to halve spills from storm overflows and upgrade the capacity of 1,700 wastewater treatment works."

Red flags

Brighton swimmers' fury over sea sewage

Pippa Neill

"I'm furious," says Jo Armstrong, 75, sitting on Brighton beach with her daughter and granddaughter.

Armstrong lives in Lewes, a town 8 miles from Brighton, and usually goes swimming in nearby Seaford in East Sussex every day. But over the past week the water there has been too polluted to swim. "Brighton beach was the only place that stayed clean," she says.

In the week Friends of the Earth ranked the UK's water companies for their environmental damage, and news of further sewage leaks emerged, the Guardian headed to Brighton beach to talk to swimmers. According to public data, a sewage alert was issued twice at the beach in August, and 158 alerts recorded overall in 2025.

"There's a tiny bit of rain and then the sewage comes, I just don't understand it. It's extraordinary that we can't have clean beaches," says Armstrong.

This summer England has endured record-breaking heatwaves during which scores of people have spent time on beaches. In Brighton, the state of the water is an issue on many people's minds.

◀ *Jo Armstrong on Brighton beach. She says it is 'extraordinary' Britain has beaches unsafe for swimming* PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN/THE GUARDIAN

▲ *Anna Field and her husband, Jim. She says checking for sewage spills is as important as checking the weather* PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN/THE GUARDIAN

Hildi Mitchell, 55, runs a programme called Pool to Pier, where she teaches pool swimmers to swim safely in open waters. Increasingly, she is finding that pollution is stopping people from taking the leap to the sea.

"There are swimmers who have swum in the pool all year round but won't come out in the sea in the summer because they're worried about becoming ill," she says.

Checking for sewage spills has become as important as checking the weather and tidal patterns. "I would love to be able to swim anywhere, rather than thinking about trying to avoid pollution," Mitchell says.

Through Pool to Pier, Mitchell offers free workshops to children from families on low incomes.

"These families already have limited things they can do in the summer to keep their children active, healthy and entertained. Swimming should be something that's free and available to local families, but it's not and that's really sad."

Greg Veros, 59, has lived in Brighton for 22 years and swum all his life, but after falling ill owing to what he believes was sewage pollution a few years ago, he now spends more time at Brighton's outdoor swimming pool. "I'm an enthusiastic swimmer, I can't get enough of it," Veros says. He used to have to skip his daily swim if there was a rainstorm or a sewage scare, but now the pool offers him an alternative. "It's the best thing to have happened to Brighton."

But for Mitchell, there is nothing that replaces swimming in the sea.

"It's about freedom. It's a place where you can just swim in the way you want to swim," Mitchell says.

Anna Field, 54, moved to Brighton so she could swim regularly, but, like Mitchell, she says checking for sewage spills is as important as checking the weather. There have been several times when she could smell the sewage. When pollution stops her from swimming, it's a bit like not being able to walk in the park because it's raining, "except with this, you feel people [are] to blame".

"I absolutely love being in the ocean. It's got its own personality. You look out of the window in the morning and it's a different colour from yesterday. On some days it will tell you, no, you're not coming in today."

"Swimming is such a nice thing for people to be able to do and it's public, anyone can go in. It would be a real shame if that was less accessible."

London's Science Museum ends long-term partnership with BP

Pippa Neill
Environment reporter

The Science Museum has ended its decades-long partnership with the oil and gas company BP in what has been described as a "seismic shift" for the institution.

The Science Museum Group Academy, which was established in 2018 to deliver training and resources, announced yesterday that it would be ending the partnership. The director and chief executive of the Science Museum Group, Sir Ian Blatchford, said it had "drawn to a close at the end of the current contract term".

Blatchford said BP's "generous contributions helped us to inspire more than 11,000 education, museum and science professionals through research-informed science engagement training, supporting vital work to spark curiosity and bring science to life for more than a million young people across the country".

BP's relationship with the museum has come under scrutiny, with the fossil fuel giant accused by campaigners in January of having an "insidious influence" over the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths in the UK through its partnership with the institution.

In 2024, the museum cut ties with the oil company Equinor over its failure to lower carbon emissions sufficiently to ensure it was aligned with the Paris climate agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C.

Chris Garrard of the campaign group Culture Unstained said this "seismic shift" came after years of pressure from educators and schools.

"With the world facing droughts and wildfires and BP recklessly ramping up its production of dirty fossil fuels, the museum has finally come to its senses and followed the rest of the culture sector in cutting ties to BP."

Garrard added this decision represented only a "partial victory". The museum still takes money from Adani Green Energy, a subsidiary of the Adani Group, one of the world's largest private coal mining and energy conglomerates.

A spokesperson for BP said its partnership with the Science Museum would "draw to a close on Monday 31 August at the end of its agreed term".

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KORN FERRY

Four men plead guilty to attack on Jewish community ambulances

Emine Sinmaz

Four men have pleaded guilty to destroying four Jewish community ambulances in an arson attack, causing about £1m of damage.

Hamza Iqbal, 20, Rehan Khan, 19, and Judex Atshatshi and Saif Ali, both 18, admitted a charge of destroying or damaging property being reckless as to whether life would be endangered.

Atshatshi, Khan and Iqbal entered their pleas by video link from Wandsworth and Pentonville jails, with Ali in the dock of the Old Bailey yesterday.

Four ambulances belonging to the Jewish volunteer emergency service Hatzola were set on fire on the morning of 23 March while they were parked near a synagogue in Golders Green, an area of north London that has a large Jewish community. Prosecutors said the attack had caused about £1m of damage.

The prosecutor Leo Seelig suggested the incident had a "terrorist connection" although no mention was made in court of potential proxies working for Iran.

Previously, counter-terror police had looked into the possible involvement of Iranian proxies in the Jewish ambulance arson as well as other attacks on Jewish sites in London.

Most have been claimed online by Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia, the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right. However, in April, Iran's embassy in the UK said it "categorically rejects" allegations of involvement in "violent activities or incidents in the United Kingdom".

Three of the defendants were said to have set fire to the fully stocked vehicles as a fourth waited in a blue Toyota Avensis. The blaze caused gas canisters in the ambulances to explode, and nearby flats and a synagogue were damaged by the fire.

The four men were arrested after an investigation by counter-terrorism police.

On his arrest on 1 April, Ali threw his mobile phone out of the window, the court was previously told. The defendant, then aged 17, had been in contact with someone in February with a view to buying a blue Toyota Avensis and had done research online about how much ambulances cost.

The prosecution had alleged Ali went on to source the Toyota that was used in the attack, with WhatsApp messages between him and a co-defendant relating to the purchase.

Prosecutors have said they believe the incident was a targeted attack against the Jewish community.

Hatzola is a Jewish charity providing free medical transport and emergency response to Jewish and non-Jewish people in north London.

Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb ordered pre-sentence reports for Iqbal and Khan, from Leyton, east London, Atshatshi, from Dagenham, east London, and Ali, of dual British-Pakistani nationality, from Walthamstow, north-east London.

Remanding them in custody, the senior judge said their sentencing would take place in spring 2027 at the conclusion of a separate trial.

At the same hearing, a fifth defendant, Subhan Ahmed, 18, from Walthamstow, pleaded not guilty to a charge of assisting an offender.

Ahmed, who is alleged to have helped to get rid of the car used in the attack, will go on trial at the Old Bailey on 27 January next year.

Additional reporting **Press Association and Associated Press**

The aftermath of the attack in Golders Green, north London, on 23 March, in which four ambulances were set on fire and nearby flats and a synagogue were damaged

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMIE LASHMAR/PA

Fear and hope on Teesside Residents speak out after week of tragic events

Mark Brown
North of England correspondent

"This place might look bad but it's not, the people are good people," said one woman before turning to her young daughter and asking: "Is this place bad?" The girl shakes her head vigorously.

It's a difficult thing to say given the week's events in Grangetown and South Bank on Teesside.

Around the corner is the burned-out shell of a house that was deliberately set on fire on Wednesday, killing Natalie McDonald, 34, and her seven-year-old niece, Valentina Foster.

Metres away is the A66 where a head-on crash killed seven people on Saturday, including two police officers. Cleveland police had linked the crash to organised crime and initially said they could not rule out it being connected to the house fire, but yesterday said there was no link.

The news will be of no surprise to neighbours and well-wishers who had gathered opposite the house in Birchington Avenue, Grangetown. "There's no connection ... 100%," said one neighbour. Another said: "It's smackheads, that's the problem round here."

John Kirton, McDonald's brother, told reporters: "My sister was not involved with anything to do with gangs, or the [crash on the] A66. That's what makes this so senseless. People think they can do whatever they like. "There's some terrible people in the world and now my sister and Valentina have gone."

People, all reluctant to give their names, say the community is tight-knit. "Everyone looks out for each other," said one woman. But they also agree that there is a big problem with gangs of boys and young men involved in drug dealing and other crimes.

People felt trapped in their own homes and afraid to go to the shops, said the Middlesbrough and Thornaby East MP, Andy McDonald. He called it a form of "terrorism".

There have been nine deaths and other possibly gang-related local crimes including a knife attack and the ramming of an empty house.

On Thursday evening, video was posted on social media showing cars being torched at a vigil for one of the men who died in the A66 crash. It was in Haswell, County Durham, 20 miles north of the crash site. The events of the last week have left a community shellshocked and in need of help, fearful of what might happen next.

Alec Brown, the leader of Redcar and Cleveland council, said authorities were working "tirelessly" to ensure people felt safe. About 200 extra police from other forces have been drafted in and the hope is that a show of strength can dampen tensions and reassure the area.

Anna Turley, the MP for Redcar, said: "It's really important to get across the fact that these incidents are not all linked. It could feel that way at the moment because of the national spotlight on us, but unfortunately, we know we've had a high level of crime."

Terry Chapman is not from Grangetown, but was "born and raised" in a different part of Middlesbrough. He didn't quite know why he had come to the site of the house blaze, but felt he had to. "I know these areas, they are like where I'm from," he said. "We have problems but when things happen like this ... it's just hard to believe. It's really horrendous and scary."

Chapman said gangsters were the minority. "The vast majority of people, including in places like Grangetown, are absolutely fantastic people.

"They may not have a lot. Some do. Some are managing and some are barely managing. But fundamentally, the majority of people are decent and they're law-abiding. The trouble is that the small minority seem to have a bigger influence in places like this and it's gone unchecked for years."

Grangetown and South Bank are deprived, rundown areas. There are small terraces of shops, many shut, and no obvious centre. It's also striking how few pubs there are.

Saturday's collision took place on the A66 between Church Lane and Normanby Road. Police had been pursuing a VW Passat with five young men in it for before it turned on to the dual carriageway, against the flow of traffic. The pursuit was aborted. Ten seconds later the Passat crashed into a police car. Everyone died at the scene, including the police officers Matthew Blades and Tom Clough.

On the corner of Church Lane and the A66, a retired steelworker surveying the bouquets left for the PCs appeared close to tears at what had happened in his community this week. "The problem is the police don't have the resources. There used to be a station in South Bank, there used to be a station in Eston. Now there's no police here and they [the criminal gangs] are doing whatever they like with drugs passing from one to another."

It's also true that the problems in this part of Teesside are not isolated. You can watch versions of the problem on TV whenever you want, whether it's Naples, Baltimore or Liverpool.

It's easy to see places like Grangetown and South Bank as postcards for forgotten England, places tabloids sometimes say are controlled by feral gangs. But scratch the surface and there is light. In South Bank on Normanby Road, near the A66 junction, is a community gallery set up by the Iraqi artist and Teesside University graduate Azad Karim Mohammed.

Saabat Gallery's coordinator, Nathaniel McGovern, has been there for five years. "Everyone is warm and welcoming round here," he said. "People are happy to help and it's a close community. It has been a mad week for everyone round here but you get nice people and bad people everywhere, don't you? I'd say this area's got more nice people than bad."

▲ *Clockwise: the site of an arson attack in which two people died; a tribute to victims of the A66 car crash; Nathaniel McGovern; Terry Chapman; and Natalie McDonald, who died in the fire*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK PINDER/ THE GUARDIAN

▲ *Valentina Foster, seven, died with her aunt in the fire on Wednesday*

> ***'It's been a mad week around here, but you get nice and bad people everywhere, don't you?'***
>
> **Nathaniel McGovern**
> *Saabat Gallery, Middlesbrough*

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HARGREAVES LANSDOWN

French far-right chief Bardella to speak at Reform conference

Angelique Chrisafis
Paris

The French far-right leader Jordan Bardella is to give a speech at Reform UK's party conference in Birmingham next week, as he attempts to strengthen international ties before Marine Le Pen runs for the French presidency next spring.

Le Pen's far-right, anti-immigration National Rally (RN) is polling high and she is predicted to reach the final round of the French presidential race in May.

Le Pen launched her presidential campaign this summer despite a Paris appeal court upholding her conviction for being at the centre of the embezzlement of more than €2.8m (£2.4m) in European parliament funds and funnelling the money into her party between 2004 and 2016. She has appealed against the ruling to France's highest court.

▲ *Jordan Bardella is expected to run on a joint ticket with Marine Le Pen*

Le Pen has said she will run for president on a joint ticket with Bardella as prime minister. Under the French political system, the president, who is head of state and has authority on foreign policy and national security, directly appoints a prime minister as head of government to run domestic affairs.

Bardella's team confirmed he would travel to Birmingham to address the Reform conference next Friday and hold a joint press conference with its leader, Nigel Farage.

Bardella, 30, and Farage, 62, held a private lunch in London at the end of last year, where they discussed anti-immigration policy.

"Nigel Farage is a great patriot, he has fought all his life to defend his country's independence, freedom and sovereignty," Bardella said after his talks with Farage. He said he hoped the Reform leader would be Britain's next prime minister.

Bardella said: "We could perhaps tomorrow be at the head of our respective governments, in a situation where he would be leading a British government and me at the head of a French government. So we're preparing our future cooperation.

"I think that we share a joint determination to stop immigration - to protect our countries from a wave of immigration to Europe that is just beginning. We're conscious that our people want to protect their identity, and I think we can find extremely pragmatic and extremely firm solutions to control immigration together."

Bardella, who is an MEP and president of RN, has supported greater police cooperation between London and Paris on people crossing the Channel on small boats but wanted migrants returned to countries of origin, not to France.

In the past, Le Pen has had a thorny relationship with Farage. In 2014, when Farage was Ukip leader and Le Pen's party was still called Front National (FN), she and Farage were competing to be seen as the EU's leading eurosceptics in European parliament elections. That year, Farage rejected a suggestion from Le Pen that Ukip could join a European parliament coalition with the FN, saying there was "prejudice and antisemitism" in Le Pen's party. She rejected his comments, saying Farage had made "defamatory" and "extremely disagreeable declarations" to increase his popularity.

The Reform UK leader was recently re-elected in a byelection in Clacton. However, parliament's standards commissioner immediately reopened an investigation into whether he should have declared gifts provided to him shortly before the last general election. These include a £5m personal gift from the crypto billionaire Christopher Harborne, first revealed by the Guardian.

▲ *Isabel Oakeshott of TalkTV said she had worked on the programme*

TalkTV 'misled viewers' over journalist's Reform links

Michael Savage
Media editor

Rupert Murdoch's online channel TalkTV is facing criticism after it did not disclose that a journalist who travelled to Britain in a small boat for a documentary was a Reform party member and activist.

The channel revealed the "world exclusive" this week, stating that the treacherous journey from France had made the former builder Christian Drogan the first British man "to invade his own country".

The documentary, titled Invading Britain: The Undercover Migrant Returns, was released on TalkTV's YouTube channel.

However, TalkTV did not mention that Drogan had previously been clear that he was a Reform member who harboured ambitions of running for office for the party.

Appearing on Reform's in-house podcast in June, Drogan said: "I'm a Reform party member. I attend my branch meetings. I would like to stand at some level."

Mic Wright, a media critic who raised concerns about Drogan's background, said audiences should be given the full picture about the reporter's affiliations.

Wright said: "It is fair enough to go and do this activity, but he's not being represented as what he is - which is a Reform activist. He is not being presented in his totality. It is deceptive to the viewers, readers and listeners of these titles and broadcasters."

The criticism was strongly rejected by Isabel Oakeshott, TalkTV's international editor, who is married to Richard Tice, Reform's deputy leader, and worked with Drogan on the documentary.

"This is a truly desperate attempt to find something negative to say," she said. "It is, in any case, abundantly clear, in both the documentary itself and accompanying TalkTV coverage, that this groundbreaking investigation was led by me. My political links could hardly be more public. The extraordinary footage obtained by my colleague Christian Drogan speaks for itself. How he chooses to vote is his own business."

Drogan said he had been motivated by "getting to the heart of the biggest issues facing our country".

Murdoch's company News UK, which owns TalkTV, did not respond to requests for comment.

'Pack of lies' Farage and Badenoch in spat as they court Meloni

Helena Horton

Nigel Farage and Kemi Badenoch are used to trading barbs and fighting for the rightwing vote. But now the party leaders find themselves in a much more bizarre struggle - for the affections of the rightwing Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni.

The row began on Monday when the Times published an article claiming that in a meeting in Rome, Meloni had advised the Tory leader against doing a deal with Farage to unite the right. After complaints from Reform - and, reportedly, Meloni's team - the article was amended to remove that claim.

Now, sources close to Farage have told the Guardian that Meloni and the Reform leader talked this week and she apologised for any confusion. They said Meloni had congratulated him for his win in the Clacton byelection this month, in which he beat a man dressed as a bin. A Reform source added: "Meloni's people have also relayed that they are disappointed about what happened."

The Italian prime minister's team said she "did not enter and does not want to enter into domestic political dynamics and relations between British parties".

▲ *Badenoch in Rome with Meloni, who the Tory leader said advised her against doing a deal with Reform UK*
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTINE QUARMYNE/CCHQ

On Monday, after her trip to Rome, Badenoch triumphantly posted a selfie with Meloni on social media, along with a caption which praised the European politician's "straight-talking, no-nonsense" attitude.

But the subsequent furore over Badenoch's comments seems to have killed her buzz. Shortly after Badenoch's cheerful post, the former Tory frontbencher Robert Jenrick, now a Reform MP, crowed: "It was obviously very, very embarrassing for Kemi Badenoch. My advice, if you go and visit a foreign leader, is don't make up a pack of lies about what they say."

A Tory spokesperson insisted the party had not made any false claims. "Reform are just making things up and peddling conspiracy theories to distract from their fishy £5m donation scandal," they said.

Meloni, a populist Italian firebrand who is firmly anti-immigration and champions social conservatism, including opposition to same-sex marriage, swept to power in Italy in 2022.

She has since moderated her approach and has become influential among world leaders, topping power lists in Forbes, Time magazine and Politico. Many on the right are keen to win her affections.

Raheem Kassam, a former adviser to Farage who owns the US politics website the National Pulse, said Meloni had fostered a good relationship with Farage since 2016.

"I have known Giorgia for a long time and in no world would she have done something like that. It's not her style," he said.

"She has a great personality. Her own personal strength and conviction is admirable."

Perhaps rightwing politicians hope Meloni's stardust will rub off on them. Her government is on track to become the longest-serving single administration in the history of the republic on 4 September.

FIVE MARVEL AT MYTHICAL MUMBLES

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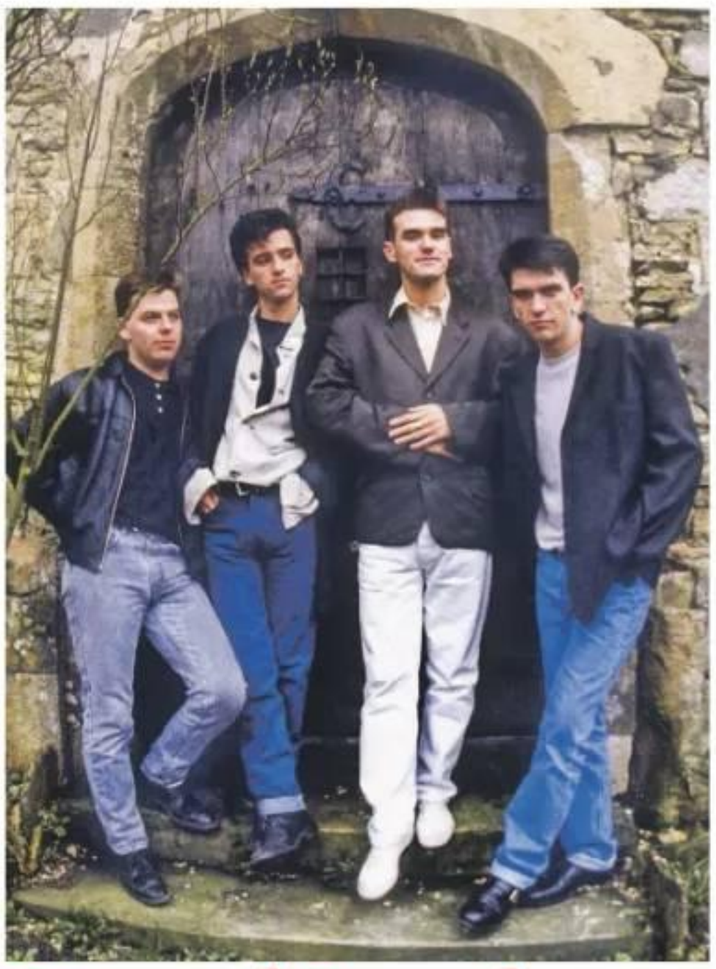
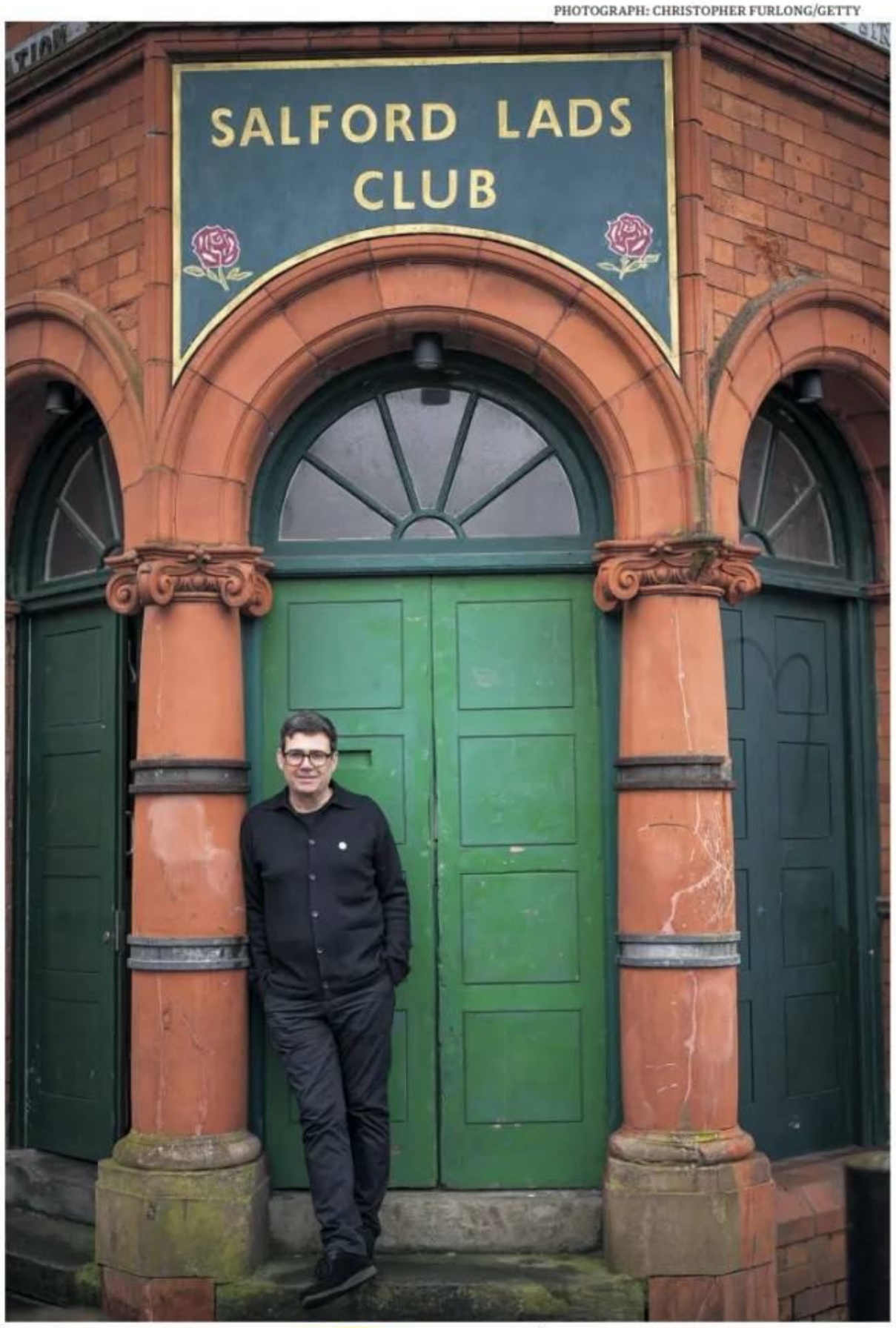




▼ *Andy Burnham launched his 2024 mayoral re-election campaign at Salford Lads Club, immortalised by the Smiths, left, pictured in 1987*

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY

Hand in glove

Smiths are soundtrack to Burnham's life and times

Zoe Williams

As an origin story, Andy Burnham: Smiths Fan has a lot going for it. It's plainly authentic: he can name the time he saw them live (Salford University, Queen Is Dead tour, 1986). A cynical young man in a hurry might fake that now, but not when he first said it, in 2013. Asked by Labour Uncut for his desert island tracks during his 2010 leadership bid, three of the eight were sung by Morrissey (two Smiths singles and one off Viva Hate), which is superfan territory.

That's a softball exercise to endear yourself to Labour members; you have eight chances to hit every base, and so to blow three lives on an artist who had already been dabbling in nationalism for 18 years (we'll come back to this) was dicey and brave. You will recall that Burnham did not win that election. If you were an enemy state, amassing this hinterland for an asset, you'd have basically done a really good job.

In the business of projecting a human being, through a miasma of talking points and half-answers, it's more important that the passion be genuine than that it hit the right cultural and social touch points, but in the late 90s and early 00s, the Smiths hit those too.

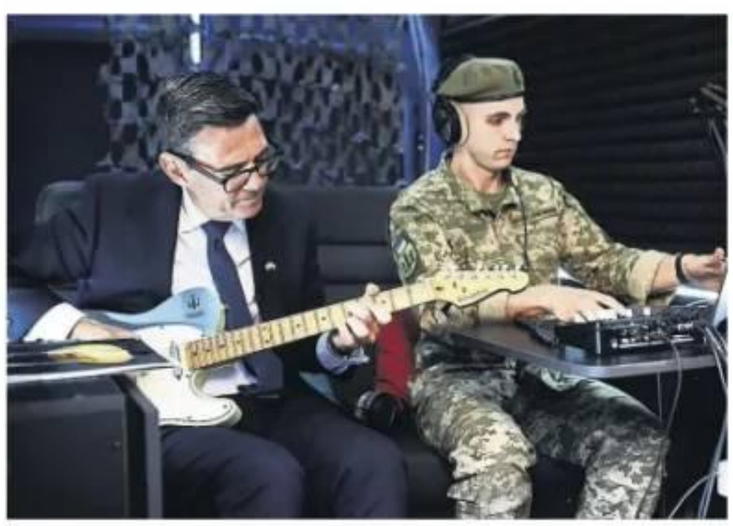
Bear in mind that they'd already been split up for a full decade by the time Tony Blair came to power and Burnham appeared in parliament, so they already signalled a bygone youth, rather than: "I am a cool dude who still goes clubbing."

But the Smiths' body of work has a worldview and it's explicitly political: the lyrics describe a nation in permanent decline, its justice a sham, its education a meat factory, its meat factories (obviously) murder, its subjects shot through with nihilism and despair. People who called the Smiths miserablist were wilfully ignoring what they sounded like, which was the opposite of despair, a penetrating vivacity that obliterated the greyness the words described.

It was funny, ironic, complicated and, even its counterculturalism was knowingly passé, declinist. There was so much in there about the queen - and who cared about the royals by the mid-80s? It had a defiant intellectualism and prefigured the 90s spirit in which everything was interpretable, and to be contradictory was a sign that you were alive.

Morrissey is known for his 'ugly politics'

In that sense, Burnham's fandom encapsulated the long 90s pretty well. You didn't have to be left behind to be alienated by modernity. You could just vibe left-behindness. When Burnham jammed Rusholme Ruffians on guitar in Kyiv on Monday, there was something plangently nostalgic about it, not for 1985, when the song was released, but for the turn of this century, when we could all be lonely yet not alone, where death wishes were routinely expressed but also a metaphor for whatever you liked, where fairgrounds were empty but also full.



◀ *The prime minister could not resist picking up a guitar in a mobile recording studio during a recent visit to Ukraine*

PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY NICHOLLS/ PRESS ASSOCIATION

It was the era when history was over, when ideological differences had collapsed; and while that turned out not to be true, it did allow in a spirit of openness and intellectual experiment that was extremely rich. It was the kind of attitude now derided as "metropolitan elitist" and Burnham noticed that, caveating in an interview in 2015, during his second leadership bid, that he went off the Smiths in his mid-20s when he decided that they were "for people who almost want to make themselves slightly superior: 'I'm into the Smiths and I look down on people who listen to Level 42.'".

That, too, was risky, since this was the musical love of his life, and he was suddenly prepared to throw them under the bus to avoid the possibility that Level 42 fans might vote for Liz Kendall. You will recall he did not win that leadership election either, and no one voted for Kendall, except, conceivably, Level 42 fans (she got 4.5%).

Two things complicated the picture. First, Morrissey's politics. By 1992, he was lyrically and performatively flirting with a nativism that is now, unavoidably, a visceral Islamophobia. Burnham has addressed, in pretty weak terms, the fact that he and Morrissey no longer see eye to eye, but that probably does it.

The musician's politics were ugly from the start of his solo career - the lyrics of Bengali in Platforms are stomach-churning - but the Smiths were never just him (as a judge famously determined in 1996, ruling on the matter of royalty-sharing). It seems unlikely to me that even Johnny Marr, (the late) Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce could tell what Morrissey would later become, when they were making that work in the 80s, let alone any of the fans.

Second, in 2006 David Cameron marched in and vandalised everything, choosing This Charming Man on Desert Island Discs, describing listening to the Smiths at Eton. It tested the proposition - we can all be as alienated as each other - to destruction, and with the most insulting imaginable song: "Why pamper life's complexity / When the leather runs smooth on the passenger seat?" can function as so much, but it cannot work as karaoke for the guy in the seat.

Marr and Morrissey both publicly forbade him from liking the Smiths, which I guess may have mollified true fans such as Burnham but did nothing to head off Cameron's callow, low-affect "I'd like to capture all the wealth but also join in your economic alienation, it looks meaningless and kinda fun" politics, and their ruinous effect on the nation.

At 56 , there's no going back for Burnham. He'll die a Smiths fan. He may as well enjoy it. Judging by his Kyiv jam and his July "I left the north again / I travelled south again" video on socials, quoting Is It Really So Strange?, it looks like he is.

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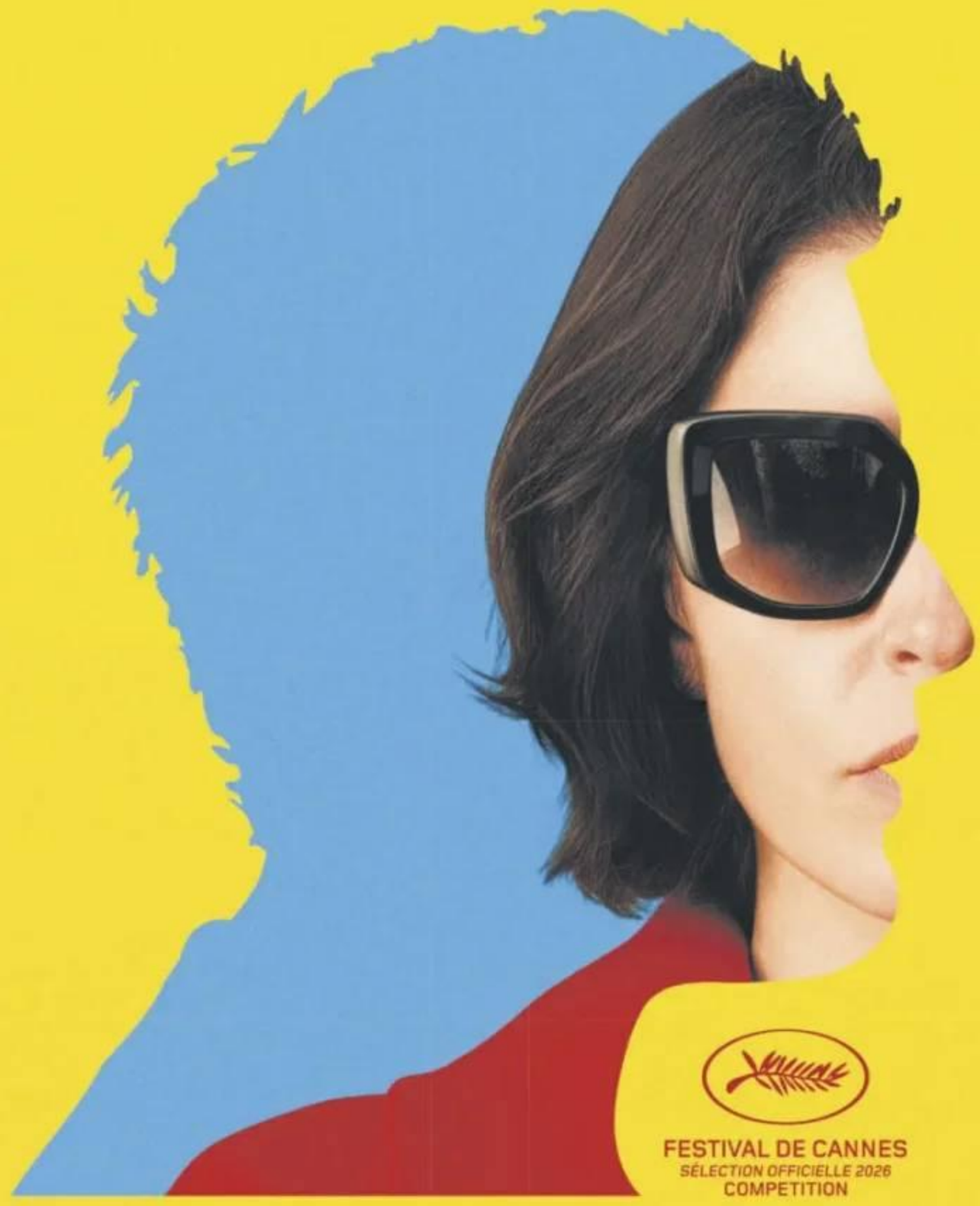

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Labour rejects Polanski's call to halt AI datacentre construction

Robert Booth
UK technology editor

Labour has rejected calls to pause the construction of major AI infrastructure in Britain after the Green party's leader, Zack Polanski, said it was time to "slam the brakes on these energy-guzzling, water-guzzling datacentres".

The government hit back at the opposition party's call for a "moratorium other than [for] local-scale datacentres for the local community", saying such a move "would be a disaster for jobs and national security".

Polanski's call for a pause comes amid one of the UK's worst droughts in years and predictions that datacentres' electricity use, currently standing at about 2.5% of the UK's supply, will rise four-fold by 2030.

Datacentres contain the processing chips that power billions of AI prompts every day and are used to train new models. Labour has designated them as critical national infrastructure, a decision Polanski called "outrageous".

"To most people, critical infrastructure means hospitals, water, electricity," he said. "It doesn't mean artificial intelligence."

He added: "Right now the government is putting our communities, our water security and our climate ambitions second to the demands of tech giants."

A spokesperson for the government said: "A pause on building new datacentres would simply send investment and good jobs abroad, while leaving Britain dependent on overseas computing for the processing of sensitive health and defence data."

The government said that "critical national infrastructure" status did not give datacentres priority access to water or electricity, and did not automatically put them ahead of households during shortages. In England, datacentres' water usage represents less than 1% of non-household water consumption, it said.

▲ *About 2.5% of UK electricity fuels datacentres and usage is set to rise*

There are signs that datacentre policy, already a political issue in November's US mid-term elections, is rising up the agenda in Britain. In energy- and water-rich Scotland, the SNP appears to be "inching towards a moratorium" amid voter pressure, while local disputes have erupted from Devon to Buckinghamshire and Cardiff to Fife. Residents have raised fears about noise, heat, traffic and the visual impact of datacentres on house prices.

Labour's AI minister, Kanishka Narayan, has linked the need for more AI datacentres to strong defence, and this month said the British public "doesn't just want foreign billionaires to own things that matter to our lives. If we're being true to those British values, it is impossible to achieve that without building a sovereign level of datacentre capacity."

The government spokesperson said its refusal to pause development "does not mean a blank cheque for big tech or that every datacentre should be approved". They said developers should "prioritise clean power, use water responsibly, create British jobs and supply chains, and provide investment to the communities in which they are built".

The tech equity campaign group Foxglove warned that with some datacentre developers seeking to sidestep long waits to connect to the national electricity grid by planning gas-fired power stations, there is a risk of a "deeply alarming backward step on climate action".

Rosa Curling, Foxglove's co-executive director, said: "It's good to hear that the government thinks there shouldn't be a 'blank cheque' for big tech's datacentres. But without urgent action, that's exactly what will happen – the public and the planet will be left to foot the bill for the environmental and social costs of these energy-hungry giants."

Fuel prices at four-year high in time for bank holiday

Lauren Almeida

Petrol prices have hit their highest level since 2022, piling more financial pressure on motorists over the bank holiday weekend.

The average cost of petrol has reached 161.6p a litre, while diesel costs an average of 183.4p, according to the AA breakdown company.

The last time the petrol price was so high was in November 2022, when it soared in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It comes as millions of people prepare to make car journeys over the bank holiday weekend, which will be marked in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The RAC estimates that the UK's motorways and major roads could have the most traffic since its records began in 2015.

The services company predicted yesterday was likely to be the worst day for heavy traffic, with more than 4.1m cars expected on the roads.

Luke Bosdet of the AA said the rise in petrol prices showed that "UK pump pricing is back to its worst". It is "too often overpriced and uncompetitive, with too many communities denied road fuel at a reasonable price", he said.

The UK's competition regulator told fuel retailers this year that it would step up its monitoring of pump prices amid concern over profiteering as the US war with Iran drives up wholesale costs.

Before the US-Israeli attack on Iran in February, Brent crude – the international benchmark for oil prices – traded at about $72 (£53) a barrel. It hit a peak of $126 a barrel in April, before dipping to $71 at the start of July on hopes of a peace deal. It now trades at $89.63.

The Competition and Markets Authority found this summer that many petrol stations were too slow to pass on falls in wholesale energy prices to their customers.

A government scheme called Fuel Finder allows drivers to compare the cost of fuel across the UK. The AA found that in some areas, petrol was being sold at about 10p below the national average cost for a litre on Thursday night, at stations in areas such as Aylesbury, Wembley and Gloucester. Bosdet said just one competitively priced forecourt "can often pull down the price of fuel locally, including at nearby supermarkets".

This month the CMA said it had sent out more than 1,000 warning letters to retailers that had failed to share their prices with the Fuel Finder service.

161.6p

Average cost of a litre of petrol, its highest level since November 2022, according to the AA. Diesel is 183.4p

Drumcree

Ruling on parade reignites old tensions

Rory Carroll
Ireland correspondent

The boiling cauldron known as Drumcree that used to scald and torment Northern Ireland every summer gradually cooled two decades ago, leaving it as a name for the history books.

Instead of pitched battles between Orangemen and police around the parish church near Portadown in County Armagh, and spin-off, murderous sectarian violence across the region, a de facto truce reigned.

The Orange Order still wished to march down Garvaghy Road in the run-up to Twelfth of July celebrations – a route opposed by the mainly Catholic residents – but its members no longer tried to storm lines of police who dug trenches and erected barbed wire to stop them.

Fury dwindled after 1998, when the mayhem threatened the nascent Good Friday agreement, and the Orangemen settled for annual peaceful, ritualised protests. However, a court ruling this week ignited a political row over Drumcree and raised the spectre of renewed confrontation next July.

The high court in Belfast on Wednesday quashed a decision by the Parades Commission to ban the Orangemen from Garvaghy Road, overturning a decision it has made every year since 1998. The commission accepted that its decision-making had been flawed. Billy Gamble, one of six commissioners, resigned.

Unionist parties hailed the ruling as an overdue comeuppance for a statutory body that adjudicates on contentious marches. Gavin Robinson, the Democratic Unionist party (DUP) leader, said: "The outcome of the legal challenge is a totemic victory which has laid bare why confidence in the Parades Commission has collapsed within the unionist community."

▲ *Orange Order members are blocked from marching in Portadown in 2023. Below, David Trimble, Tony Blair and John Hume in 1998, the year of the Good Friday agreement* PHOTOGRAPHS: CHARLES MCQUILLAN/GETTY IMAGES; PA/ALAMY

> *'The question here for the leaders of unionism is: why do they want us to revisit those dark days?'*
>
> **Michelle O'Neill**
> *First minister*

Nationalist politicians, in contrast, expressed foreboding.

Sinn Féin's Michelle O'Neill, the first minister, visited Garvaghy Road and said residents feared a return to violence. "Does anybody really want to see those days? This community certainly doesn't. I certainly do not want to see those days visited upon us and I think the question here is, for the leaders of unionism: why do they want us to revisit those dark days?"

The dispute centres on the legitimacy and workings of the Parades Commission. It adjudicates on thousands of marches each year and is credited with a dramatic reduction in parade-related disorder but unionists have long alleged bias.

The Orange Order accused the commission of a "copy and paste" response in refusing applications and of overlooking the Order's willingness to engage with communities that opposed certain marches.

Last month a Portadown Orangeman launched a legal challenge over the most recent decision on Drumcree, which led to Mr Justice McAlinden ruling that the commission had not followed procedure.

"Public administration must have the confidence of the public and that means that when errors are made, when shortcuts are taken, when sloppy procedures are manifest, those issues come to the public knowledge and appropriate corrections are made within that administrative body to ensure that such behaviour does not occur again," he ruled.

Unionist leaders want all the commissioners to resign but the chair, Evelyn Collins, vowed to stay and fix the problems, saying: "We will work hard to regain the trust of all sections of the community."

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THIS BANK HOLIDAY HAVE A BLAST

Dads v the dudes

Vests and baggy shorts take on smart looks at US Open

Ellie Violet Bramley

There is a competition going on at the US Open this week and it's not the one involving rackets and balls. Instead, leading men who are not entered into the draw are serving looks rather than aces.

Tennis legend Roger Federer took to the court on Tuesday in green-blue polo shirt, navy blue shorts, sweatbands and socks. The young Spanish player, Carlos Alcaraz, wore a Nike vest, untucked, the colour of Ribena, maroon shorts, and trainers that looked like a sweetshop counter.

The players represent two style clans that are dominating current menswear: the dads and the dudes. If you're not sure what side of the sartorial net they're on, here's a quick form guide. Novak Djokovic, Taylor Fritz and Félix Auger-Aliassime are all "dad". Arthur Fils and Andre Agassi: "dude".

The "dad" look, which has nothing to do with paternal status, is summed up by straight, tight lines, on the whole more muted colours and embellishment for practicality's sake; a carefully placed sweatband for a tennis player; a pair of neat little cufflinks on a suit. What it is not, says men's fashion editor Hikmat Mohammed, "is just your dad who wears normcore. It's an elevated dad ... they wear Ralph Lauren, they wear Brunello Cucinelli, they wear Loro Piana." Or if thousand-pound price tags aren't in reach, they wear Cos and Arket.

Mohammed cites Mark Zuckerberg in caramel-hued cashmere on the Prada front row this year as "dad". But "Elevated Dad" has trickled down to the latest John Lewis menswear look, which is full of sensible overcoats, cashmere cardigans and argyle knits. According to Jacqui Markham, fashion creative director, "a lot of what we're calling 'dad style' is really just great menswear fundamentals rediscovered, after a few years of fashion having moved so fast in the other direction."

◀ *Roger Federer's classic cool style contrasts with Carlos Alcaraz's baggy look. Above, Adam Sandler was declared a fashion icon in 2019*

Searches for "elevated wardrobe staples have increased significantly this season", she says - "polo shirts with proper collars, chinos that actually fit, the perfect cut blazer". Dudes wear things baggier, have adornments for adornment's sake - a backwards cap or a chunky chain. It's an atmosphere in which the late Bill Oddie has been hailed a style icon. But the patron saint of the style is Adam Sandler who, in 2019 was declared a fashion icon for his unapologetic "grocery-run look" by Vogue writer Liana Satenstein.

Dude-style streetwear can take a lot of searching for, and can cost far more than a shirt and chinos, especially some of the rare, vintage stuff, which "[has] almost become memorabilia", says Mohammed.

Why are these style camps so prevalent now? Mohammed thinks it could be a recession indicator: "People just want a full look that's clear and really sharp," he says. It could be as well a case of the slower menswear cycle playing out: "I feel like finally the quiet luxury that womenswear had is finally catching up to men."

Stage

Mr Nostalgia looks back in standup

Falling From a Moon
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★★☆

Brian Logan

There's a moment when *that* ends," muses Li Jin Hao, "and *this* begins ...." As well as being packed with swoonsome one-liners like that, Li's show traces the tension between this and that; the draw that the past exerts on this self-proclaimed Mr Nostalgia versus the necessity of living in the present.

Beginning with a yearning sun-and-moon myth, Li's show - nominated for the Edinburgh comedy award - toggles between a day in his current London life and memories of his upbringing in Asia.

What makes the show distinctive, though, is the ruminative angle at which Li addresses his experiences - so many ravishing insights revealing the world to us in shapes askew. It's a leap forward from his 2024 debut, which was sheepish in its delivery. The only thing sheepish here is the twisty livestock gag that opens Li's show, with a swagger that marks a performer now in his element.

So if his present is in such good nick, why the nostalgia? That question won't initially trouble you, as we follow him from his flat with a sloping floor, to public transport (on pressing the stop button: "I'm tickling the bus!"). He detours via sumptuous routines and notions: how differently letters and numbers behave and rhyme versus reason, then back to a Chinese childhood and Singaporean youth in vivid colour.

The show is about the need to put that past behind him - a theme it over-articulates in its closing moments. We can glean plenty from what goes before, while glorying in the play contained in image after joke after slanted aperçu. *That* was the show I saw; this is Li's moment.

Until tomorrow

▲ *Standup Li Jin Hao returns to Edinburgh's fringe with playful ruminations on myth and memory* PHOTOGRAPH: REBECCA NEED-MENEAR

Comedy

Gently weird lessons from an ex-teacher

Tom Towelling Teaches You to Knit
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★☆☆

Brian Logan

The route from the classroom to the comedy stage is well travelled, and the ex-maths teacher Tom Towelling makes it the thread of his show here, conducting his audience like so many recalcitrant pupils.

In case that sounds triggering, never fear: this debut show is unlike any schoolroom you've been in. Towelling is one of several oddball comics elevated to the best newcomer shortlist for this year's Edinburgh comedy awards, and his show is a noodly, mellow collage of sketch, song and educational back-and-forth with the crowd.

Let's get the title out of the way. When audience members play ball, Towelling rewards them by binding them together loosely with wool. As the show progresses, a cat's cradle unspools, towards - well, nothing in particular. That's not the only instance when you feel you're on the receiving end of quirkiness for quirkiness's sake - see his closing routine revealing his supposed life ambition.

At the performance I saw, that skit was memorably interrupted by an invader demanding to see his 12-inch penis. Hilarity ensued - and Towelling can take some credit, having set that process in motion when he expelled an audience member for requesting to hear his supposed "forbidden joke". Harness that level of unpredictability to his act and he really could be in business.

In the meantime, he's got a gently cocooning hour of low-level eccentricity. A winner last year of Channel 4's Sean Lock award for comic invention, Towelling showcases that quality here, even if inventive parts are yet to knit together into a satisfying whole.

Until tomorrow

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A new stage Festival fans fear 'nepo babies' are benefiting from ditching BBC scheme

Daniel Dylan Wray

This year's Reading and Leeds festival lineups are a testament to the catholic tastes of a generation who have little regard for musical tribalism or the concept of genre: brash pop stars rub up against drum'n'bass acts, underground rappers, meat-and-potatoes indie bands and much more.

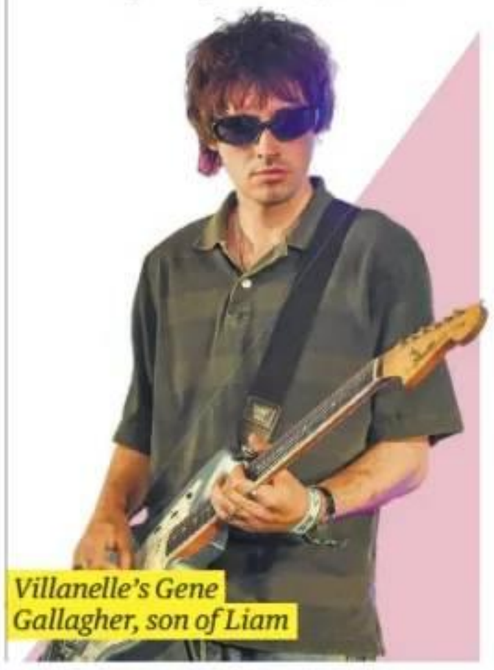
What at least 70% of those acts have in common, however, is that early on in their careers they were supported by the BBC's Introducing scheme, a combination of regional and national radio shows playing music submitted by unsigned artists and festival stages that platform them. For almost 20 years, a BBC Introducing stage has been a core part of Reading and Leeds - until it was scrapped last month.

"It's a loss," said Juliette Jackson, of the Mercury-nominated indie band the Big Moon, who played the stage in 2015, a year after forming. "It was a really big deal to play that as a new band with no money. It's huge when you're starting out - it gives you an opportunity and puts you on a platform."

Over the years, British artists including Ed Sheeran, Charli xcx, the 1975 and Sam Fender started their careers with support from the initiative, which has few of the barriers to entry of the traditional music industry. Regional DJs suggest local acts for festival slots, with final decisions made by a wider BBC team.

Reading and Leeds organisers Festival Republic did not respond to detailed questions from the Guardian about why it had pulled the plug on an unsuspecting BBC, who were already planning their 2026 lineup. It has been replaced by the Canopy stage, billed as a "home for new and breaking acts".

In a public statement, Festival Republic claimed it offers greater opportunity: "Previously, only artists who had been selected by the BBC were qualified to play the Introducing Stage - now, we are able to open up this important platform to a much wider pool of emerging talent and book any new music artist for the stage."


Villanelle's Gene Gallagher, son of Liam

But that "wider pool" has come under scrutiny. Fans have been highlighting the connections behind acts booked, such as Violet Grohl (daughter of Dave), Cruz Beckham (son of Victoria and David) and the Villanelle frontman Gene Gallagher (son of Liam). The boyband December 10 are already signed to a label after they formed on Simon Cowell's Netflix series The Next Act.

It has led some to nickname the Canopy "the nepo baby stage", and prompted coverage in Private Eye. In an Instagram post, the music industry commentator the Secret DJ decried "nepotism and the rising use of famous names over new talent [that] is rapidly destroying the arts".

In a general statement provided to the Guardian, Festival Republic said their booking policy for the stage is "open to emerging artists from all backgrounds and at different stages of development. Artists may be independent or signed and may have come through a variety of routes into the industry."

▲ Violet Grohl, onstage in California with her father, Dave Grohl, will perform on the Canopy stage. Right, BBC Introducing alumnus Charli xcx

The BBC Introducing editor, Kelly Betts, told the Guardian: "We will miss being at Reading and Leeds for this year. Programming decisions for that stage are made

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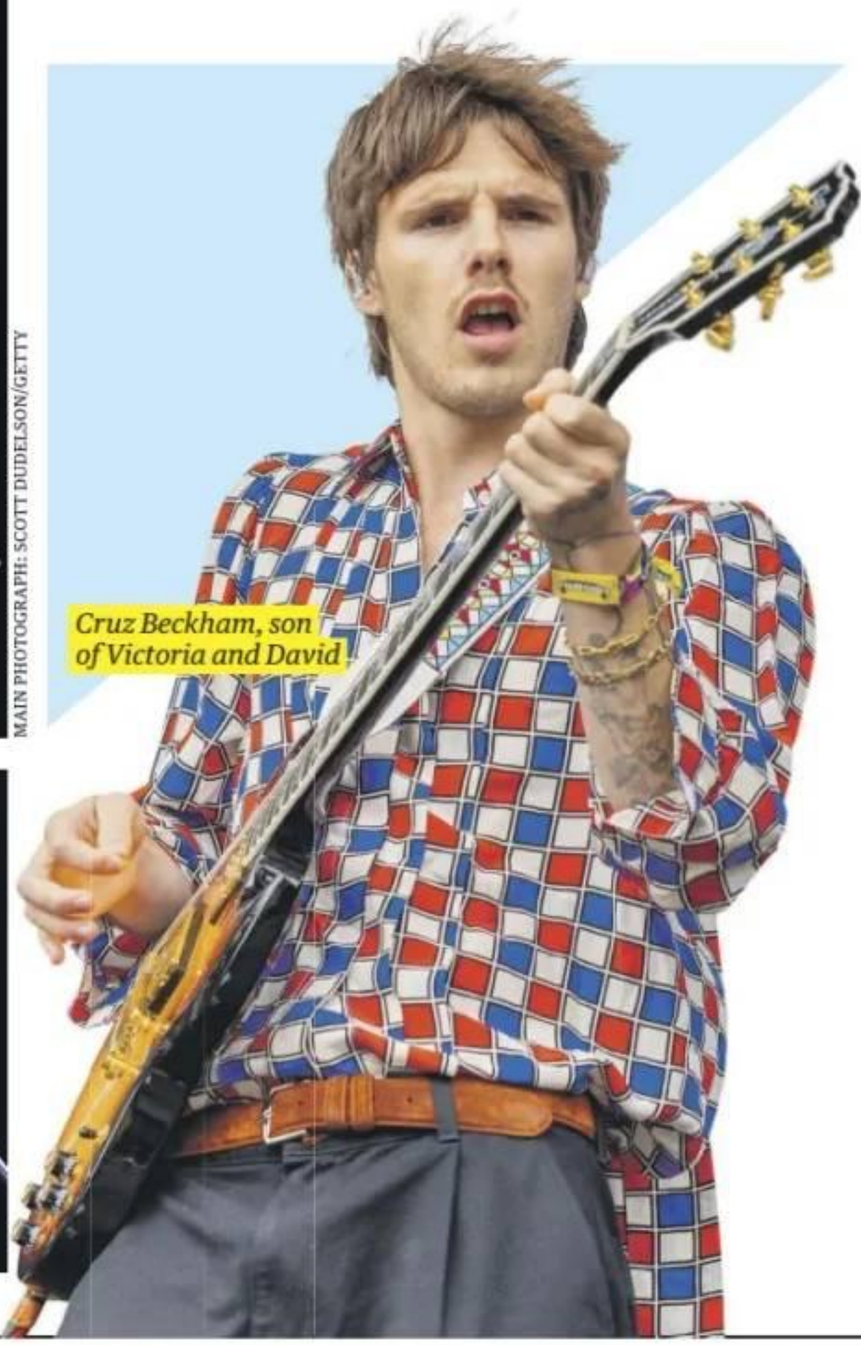

Cruz Beckham, son of Victoria and David

by the festival organisers, so it's not really for me to comment on how they choose to curate it."

Jason Carter, who founded BBC Introducing in 2007 and was responsible for forging the relationships with festivals to put on live events, said he was "disappointed to hear [the news] and sad to see it no longer there" but that he "can see both sides", adding that the industry has changed and "there's a lot more ways today to access new music that the festival probably wants the opportunity to feed off".

The ex-BBC Introducing presenter Tom Robinson said that while "the beauty of BBC introducing was that you needed no inside access", it could still occasionally be an "arcane" process. It was also not immune from someone in the industry "having a whisper in the ear of somebody, and an act that a record company was supporting would mysteriously appear on the BBC Introducing stage. But on the whole, it worked, and it was great."

But with Glastonbury fallow this year – and with it their BBC Introducing stage – it's an extra blow for young artists. "Reading and Leeds is a big moment in our calendar," said Jess Iszatt, who hosts BBC Radio 1's Introducing show. "Because it's got such a young audience, it's a really important one, and it means there's less opportunity for the artists that we share each week on the show. It's really sad and it feels like the end of an era."

> *'It's a loss. It was a big deal to play BBC's Introducing as a new band with no money'*
>
> **Juliette Jackson**
> *The Big Moon*

BBC Introducing is far from finished – it has just announced a month of live events in 10 British cities in November, has expanded into the US, and continues to host stages at other festivals. But the sole grassroots pipeline to a major UK event has now been closed off. "When we talk about the successes of it, it [the decision] doesn't make sense to me," said Iszatt.

As for accusations of favouring established artists, Robinson prefers to see this as an opportunity. "Let the nepo babies go and do their nepo baby thing. If they make shit music, it'll still be shit music. If they make great music, they deserve to succeed, but let's not worry about them."

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Environment

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◀ *An Asiatic black bear in northern Japan. The species accounted for 12,000 of the 14,000 bears culled from April 2025 to January 2026*

Extinction fears Bears killed 13 people so Japan killed more than 14,000 bears

Gloria Dickie

Every summer, millions of people escape the heat and humidity of Tokyo by heading to the tranquil resort town of Karuizawa in Japan's Nagano prefecture - just an hour by bullet train from the capital. Here, at the foot of Mount Asama, visitors stroll bamboo-lined pathways, cycle in verdant highlands, and practise the wellness ritual of shinrin-yoku, bathing among the cool hinoki forests. It would be the ideal nature retreat - if it wasn't for the bears.

From June to August, bears often move close to Karuizawa, feeding on the mulberries, ants, leaves and cherry blossoms that grow near the town. Unlike nuts, these foods are low in calories, spurring the bears to seek out further sustenance. "They're more likely to get close to residential spaces to see what they can find," says Amelia Hiorns, a British zoologist who previously worked with Picchio Wildlife Research Center in the town. "This combines with the busiest season for tourists."

Picchio, a small Japanese conservation and nature education group, has been working to improve coexistence between bears and people in Karuizawa and the surrounding region since the 1990s. Staff respond to reported bear sightings with one of their three karelians - a dog breed trained in the western US to chase away bears. When dogs aren't enough, the Picchio team tranquilises and relocates bears deep in the forest.

Today, Karuizawa's approach has few parallels in Japan, as conflicts between bears and humans surge to unprecedented levels across the country.

Last year, bears attacked more than 230 people in the country and killed 13, making it the deadliest year on record. Most attacks were in the mountainous northern prefectures of Akita and Iwate, where record-breaking heat affected the growth of beech nuts and acorns that bears rely on to fatten up for hibernation. Diminished human populations in Japan's rural hinterlands, with orchards and woodlands left abandoned, exacerbated the situation as bears descended into villages in search of food.

The attacks dominated national and international news. Foreign governments - including Britain's - issued travel advice warning of heightened bear risk. Insurance companies began offering "bear insurance" to cover repairs to ransacked properties. Farmers installed animatronic wolves with glowing red eyes to frighten off the animals. Warning posters adorned lamp-posts. One Japanese company promoted a private bear attack shelter.

In Karuizawa, Hiroo Tamatani, the leader of Picchio's bear team, said it had already captured 19 bears this year and responded to more than 130 sightings and incidents - up about 20% since this time last year. But there has been no rise in the actual number of bear damage incidents. After news coverage of the attacks, people are simply more aware of bears.

▲ *A Picchio member in forests near Karuizawa with a karelian bear dog*

Hiorns said: "People would be seeing little molehills in their garden and think it was bear poop ... We would get calls asking if it was safe to come to Karuizawa. People lost business because of it."

Central to the rise in bear attacks, the national government says, is a lack of skilled hunters to help manage the population. Local associations have struggled to attract new members, with the number of licensed hunters falling by more than half since 1975.

Left with few options, last year the government relaxed the rules for shooting bears in populated areas, as officials laid traps across the country. The result: from April 2025 through to January 2026, Japan culled more than 14,000 bears, government data shows. That included about 12,000 Asiatic black bears (*Ursus thibetanus*) and 2,000 brown bears (*Ursus arctos*).

The high death toll has raised concerns among conservationists. Asiatic black bears are deemed vulnerable to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with fewer than 60,000 remaining worldwide. "If this level of trapping continues, we believe regional extinctions are a real possibility. We feel a profound sense of crisis," said Yuko Muroya, chair of the Japan Bear and Forest Society (Kumamori), which focuses on conservation and coexistence.

Japan is one of the Asiatic black bear's last strongholds, with an estimated 42,000 bears. Scientists say that figure is likely to be an undercount, but no one really knows how many there are there.

Still, removing what could amount to a quarter of the country's population has seemingly done little to deal with the problem. Since April, six people have been killed and more than 35 attacked across at least nine prefectures - including some close to Tokyo - according to government statistics.

Muroya said it was clear Japan's heavy-handed approach was not working. Yet the government announced a target of slaughter a further 8,800 bears this fiscal year. "A government strategy focused solely on reducing bear numbers will not solve the bear problem until bears themselves are driven to extinction," she said.

The scale of bear culling in Japan is unrivalled in the modern era. Most countries, including Canada, Russia and the US, permit the legal hunt of less than 10% of their respective brown bear and American black bear populations - neither of which is considered endangered. In India, where aggressive sloth bears (*Melursus ursinus*) attack hundreds and kill dozens of people every year, authorities estimate that fewer than 100 bears are destroyed- often through retaliatory killings rather than government mandate.

Only Sweden and Slovenia come close to Japan's statistics. In 2024, the Swedish government permitted hunters to kill about 20% of the country's brown bears. Last year, Slovenia approved a cull for one-fifth of its brown bear population.

"It's a big reaction," said Dave Garshelis, a biologist and co-chair of the IUCN's bear specialist group and its Asiatic black bear expert team. "I think the [Japanese] government felt compelled to just get rid of these bears."

Until last year, Japan had adopted a more retrained approach. From 2008 to 2018, between 1,000 and 4,500 bears were slaughtered every year, as well as legal sport hunting of about 500 a year. But that number had been ticking up, with more than 9,000 bears killed

Growing pains
Which plants cope in hot conditions?
Saturday, page 62

▲ *A bear-intrusion drill in Kanagawa prefecture, near Tokyo. Below, warning stations are common on mountain trails* MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: KIM KYUNG-HOON/REUTERS

in 2023-24 – another bad food year for the animals that led to six human fatalities.

Whether Japan's bear cull ultimately poses a global conservation concern "really depends on how many they have", said Garshelis.

Bears are notoriously hard to count, owing in part to their solitary and wide-ranging nature. Japan last attempted to put some parameters around its population in 2011, tallying between 13,000 and 21,000 Asiatic black bears by aggregating prefecture survey estimates. Since then, officials have said there are 42,000 – but no new study has been conducted.

Shinsuke Koike, an ecologist at Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, leads the Japan Bear Network, a nonprofit promoting coexistence through research. He is sceptical not just of the national figures, but also of global estimates. "In many countries, even the distribution of Asiatic black bears is not well understood," he said. "It is impossible to estimate the global population with high accuracy."

In one study area of central Japan in 2023 Koike's team found the Asiatic black bear population was growing at a rate of between 11% and 12% a year. He said that under the right environmental conditions, it was possible that population growth in some parts of western Japan might reach 15%.

That would mean, without hunting or culls, the country's bear population would double every five years. Under such a scenario, killing 15% of bears every year would keep the population stable. Anything greater would trigger a decline.

Globally, the IUCN says the Asiatic black bear population is shrinking. A 2024 study in the journal Scientific Reports found the Asiatic black bear's worldwide range had contracted by about half compared with records from the 19th and 20th centuries.

"Animal welfare groups often claim the Asiatic black bear is an endangered species, but that is from a global perspective, and it should not be brought into Japan's bear issue," Koike said.

Garshelis agrees with Koike that falling populations in, say, Vietnam or Laos should have little bearing on Japan's management. "If you're in Japan and you're having people being mauled by bears, I don't think they have the responsibility to the species as a whole in terms of the other countries." The hazard was that if authorities thought they were slashing the population by a quarter, they might find they had halved the bears' numbers because their estimates were inaccurate.

A spokesperson for Japan's environment ministry said a new nationwide bear survey had been started this year, and would take an estimated three years to complete.

But Japan's booming bear population has now run up against a sharp drop in forest foods. Kumamori's researchers are documenting how the climate crisis is altering Japan's forests. They have witnessed widespread dieback of Mongolian oak, acorns destroyed by grey weevils, poor seed production in Japanese beech and sharp declines in pollinating insects that have led to sparse berry yields.

Kumamori plants nut-bearing trees, hoping to encourage the bears to stay in the woods.

"In the past, Japan successfully maintained a separation between people and bears." Muroya said. "We should learn how our ancestors achieved that coexistence. We should also learn from other countries, many of which have moved beyond policies focused solely on culling."

'Slowest fashion imaginable': the woman growing her own dress

Nicola Davis
Science correspondent

From crop tops to shorts and brightly patterned dresses, many clothes today are a result of fast fashion. Now one woman is taking a radical approach to challenging the trend – by growing her own dress.

Eve Ogden Schaub is creating a linen garment based on flax she is growing at home, documenting the process on videos shared on her Instagram account. "I had this idea that I wanted to find the slowest fashion imaginable. And that's when I had the idea I could grow a dress from seed in my backyard," she says.

Schaub is already 18 months into the project, begun in April 2025 when she turned a 600 sq ft (56 sq metres) vegetable garden in the US state of Vermont into a plot for growing flax.

Having harvested the first crop, she sowed and harvested a second. She is also learning to process the material in steps that would not sound amiss in a Grimms' fairytale – sometimes enlisting family and friends to help.

"We retted it, which is a sort of decomposition process, and then you do breaking and scutching and hackling, and you have to spin and scour and then maybe dye your yarn," she says, adding she is growing indigo plants for the last purpose.

Once the flax has been spun into linen yarn, Shaub will weave it on a huge loom – not unlike Penelope in The Odyssey – before cutting out and sewing a dress. "So it's an enormous undertaking, but something that not all that long ago was completely commonplace, and I found that a very attractive, interesting facet of the project," she says.

As she points out, it has never been easier to get a cheap, convenient garment delivered to one's door. However "fast fashion" has become an environmental and health catastrophe, with garments ending up on huge dumps in Ghana, and workers in India's recycling factories experiencing ailments including lung disease.

In our current culture, "if you can do something cheaper and faster, it's always the preferred option", Schaub says. "And I want to step back and say, but is it? What might we stand to gain if we were to slow down and try to find things that are more meaningful to us, that bring us something that we can't get from this fast-paced commercial world?"

She also wants to explore the value of creativity, and question what benefits people may gather from making more things.

> *'It's an enormous undertaking, but not all that long ago was completely commonplace'*
> **Eve Ogden Schaub**
> *Author*

PHOTOGRAPHS: STEPHEN SCHAUB

A self-described "fibre-person and maker" Schaub is no stranger to lifestyle experiments, having written books on several projects, including her family's attempts to give up sugar for a year and go 12 months without producing any rubbish.

The latter, says Schaub, dovetails with her new endeavour, noting that in avoiding waste, she learned about synthetic materials and the issues plastic poses for our environment and our bodies. "Unfortunately, we're all walking around wearing plastic bags most of the time, and we don't even realise it," she says.

Schaub hopes her project will shine a light on the implications of modern clothing – including the poor treatment and low pay of those producing such garments.

"The whole system, I want to question and say, is this what we want?" she says.

▲ *Schaub is also learning to process her flax to spin into linen yarn*

In her efforts to go from ground to garment, Shaub has picked the brains of myriad experts, adding that valuing shared knowledge is another facet of the experiment.

But she admits some steps have proved easier to get the hang of than others: in one of the many videos capturing her attempts at spinning Schaub is left grimacing at the camera.

"There's something inherently funny in the learning process, because you screw up and you screw up, and you know you're going to screw up," she says.

The project, she adds, has been an eye-opener for many. "I get so many people commenting on my social media posts saying, 'now I understand. Now I understand why clothes were so expensive, why cloth was a valuable commodity, why people only owned one or maybe two outfits, because it was so hard to get,'" she says.

Schaub adds her own views about clothing have changed too, noting she no longer finds department store clothing appealing, and has a greater motivation to appreciate and mend the clothes she already has.

As for the final dress, Schaub admits her previous experience in sewing has only run as far as making Halloween costumes. But she is planning to work with an experienced friend to design the linen garment based on historical dress patterns.

"I cannot predict when this project will end, but I promise I'm gonna wear something at the end of this," she says, adding whatever she produces, it will be deeply meaningful to her. "Because of that, I hope it will be beautiful," she says. "I know it will be beautiful to me."

Eyewitnessed
Pictures of the week

▶ *A mural of Dolly Parton in Costa Mesa, California. The country music star, actor and philanthropist died aged 80 on Tuesday*
JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY

▲ *Two girls walk past collapsed buildings in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. Israel has continued to attack the strip despite last year's ceasefire*
BASHAR TALEB/GETTY

◀ *Taiwanese soldiers mark 68 years since the Taiwan Strait crisis, when China attacked its islands*
BEN BLANCHARD/REUTERS

◀ A horse rider displays his skills before a cheering crowd at the annual Sant Climent festival in Menorca. After music and parades over the weekend, the fiesta ends with a water fight

PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHIAS OESTERLE/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ An anti-US billboard in Tehran. The US said on Monday it would impose sanctions on any country maintaining economic ties with Iran

AFP/GETTY

▲ A home razed by the Hawk wildfire in Reno, Nevada, which spread across 6,000 hectares and destroyed at least 32 homes

JOSH EDELSON/GETTY

◀ Julius Mokaya poses as Enjin, a character from the manga series Gachiakuta, before Nairobi's Otamatsuri comic-con convention

LUIS TATO/GETTY

World

Trump's war on Iran is rapidly draining US navy's budget, documents reveal

Aram Roston

Donald Trump's war on Iran has driven the US military into a severe financial crisis, with the US navy forced to transfer money from its payroll and other sources to cover the costs of combat, according to documents seen by the Guardian, and interviews with navy officials, contractors and defence analysts.

The US-Israeli operation, which has depleted US munitions stockpiles and prompted retaliatory Iranian strikes that have wrecked strategic bases across the Middle East, is piling pressure on budgets across the military.

One Pentagon memo about navy funding seen by the Guardian warns that there are "shortfalls in payroll" accounts due to the department "raiding" them to fund combat operations.

Experts and former officials say the accounts are running dry. "The piggy bank is broken," said Harlan Ullman, a retired naval officer. Ullman is a member of the National Commission on the Future of the Navy, but he said he was not speaking on the commission's behalf.

One official and one navy contractor said non-emergency maintenance on shore-based facilities had been deferred because of the cash crunch.

When Trump started the war on 28 February, it quickly strained the military's existing budgets - particularly that of the navy, which not only helped launch the initial wave of attacks but was later responsible for an extensive naval blockade. The White House eventually asked Congress for emergency funding to pay for the war, but prospects that the request will be approved are dim amid the unpopularity of the conflict.

A navy official who was briefed on how the service was planning to address the shortfalls said money was shifted around in imaginative ways. "The money for payroll," he said, "was robbed to pay for overseas contingencies and is being backfilled by money that hasn't been spent. They are backfilling payroll so we get enough money in our paycheck."

The navy's budget for 2026, almost $300bn (£220bn), has separate batches of money allocated by Congress for various requirements: personnel, shipbuilding, procuring specific weapons systems and "operations and maintenance", the day-to-day running of the fleet and its bases. The law limits how money can be redistributed throughout all those batches of money.

The issue has occasionally surfaced in some hearings on Capitol Hill. In a 21 July hearing of the Senate appropriations committee, its chair, Susan Collins, said: "I'm told some military services face near-term solvency challenges." A staffer said the navy was one of the services Collins was referring to.

In a statement, a navy spokesperson said maintenance and operations funds had not been depleted. "The Department of the Navy," the statement said, "is actively managing its resources to meet current pay obligations on time. We continue to work closely with Congress to address ongoing operational demands and sustain our personnel and readiness throughout the fiscal year."

Inside the service, the cash shortage is no secret. "They're just not speaking publicly about it," said Todd Harrison, a defence analyst at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "And I suspect that is a deliberate decision of the civilian leaders in the Pentagon, starting at secretary, that this is for political reasons, that they don't want to look like they're damaging future military readiness over a war that is becoming increasingly a political liability."

The military knew the crisis was coming. In mid-May, Adm Daryl Caudle, chief of naval operations, warned Congress that the crunch would hit in July. "The FY '26 budget didn't bake in Epic Fury," he said. "I do fear that I'll have to start making decisions in the July timeframe on how I do force generation. That could make differences between how I do exercises, how I do routine operations in order to make sure that I ... have the funds necessary to continue the war effort for Epic Fury."

Pete Hegseth has pushed Congress for emergency funding, without which, he said in July, "we face critical shortfalls". The defence secretary testified that the Iran war cost $35.7bn, but it is unclear if that is a full assessment of the war's costs.

When the Trump administration asked Congress for $67bn in emergency funds for the defence department, it did not break down how much would be for the navy. The House passed a $1.15tn defence bill in July and a separate budget authorisation that would provide $73bn for the war in Iran, but it is unlikely either will become law.

Ullman noted that during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, funding was more forthcoming from Congress because those conflicts were authorised by a resolution. "There is no authorisation to use force in this case. Is Congress obliged to pay for a conflict it did not authorise?" he said.

The fact that the navy is broke - or at least out of money for now - may be a slap in the face for Trump.

Among his naval ambitions are plans for "Trump class" ships - the largest battleships in US history.

At this point, however, funding a war with no clear endgame is the main challenge. A former military officer now working for a navy contracting company, who has been briefed on the shortfalls, said: "They're fucked. They shot all their weapons; they trashed all their ships; they ran out of their money."

▼ *Sailors line up missiles on the flight deck of USS Abraham Lincoln at the start of the war in February*
PHOTOGRAPH: US NAVY/GETTY IMAGES

'An act of memory'

Couple chooses to wed in Putin's path of destruction

Dan Sabbagh
Kramatorsk

In the bright early afternoon sun of Kramatorsk's central and now paradoxically named Peace Square, Tetiana, in her bridal dress, and Oleksandr, in his military uniform, are holding their phones up at the ready. It is a public holiday, 35 years since Ukraine's declaration of independence, and a popular day for a wedding, though the open-air location is not ideal.

Three days earlier, Kramatorsk, perhaps Vladimir Putin's principal target, was formally designated part of the combat zone, the front inching towards the city as Russia closes in on the parts of the Donetsk region it does not control. It is quiet at 2pm though; the ceremony brief. There are no guests other than the Guardian team.

Getting married in Kramatorsk, Oleksandr says, is a necessary act of memory, because soon there may not be much more left to survive. "In this war, all this can just be vaporised, in a few months, in a few days," the groom explains immediately after the ceremony. "On the battlefield, many cities, towns, small villages where I was two, three years ago, they are now just ruins, just destroyed."

A year ago, Kramatorsk was a functioning city, a regional industrial centre, swollen with the presence of the military. Now it

Butcher of Bosnia
Ratko Mladić's dark legacy remains
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Vaccine lies
US senator calls for RFK Jr investigation
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◀ *Oleksandr, a soldier, lifts his bride, Tetiana, a medic, in Kramatorsk, a city on the verge of attack, right*

PHOTOGRAPHS: JULIA KOCHETOVA/ THE GUARDIAN

◀ *The couple were determined to marry in the city despite the danger and a journey there under miles of anti-drone netting*

▶ *Both with ties to the Donetsk region, their wedding was about 'building something beautiful' there, said Tetiana*

is covered in anti-drone netting, locals and businesses are in short supply; many buildings have been bombed, chipboard replacing windows in those still standing.

Six people were reported killed between last Saturday and Tuesday in 51 shelling incidents as the city heads towards becoming uninhabitable for all but the most stubborn civilians. Reports swirl that Russia's elite Rubicon drone unit has deployed to attack a city that Putin wants captured by the end of the year, though his forces will almost certainly take far longer.

The day before the wedding, Russian quadcopter drones had repeatedly tried to target the vast Ukrainian flag atop an 80-metre pole in the city's central park, just under a mile to the south. Such is the pettiness of the war at times, and a small tear was visible in the standard afterwards. Yet the couple were determined to marry there, regardless of the threat.

Tetiana says it is "about preserving memories of the Donetsk region, if only in this way". Oleksandr is from Mariupol, captured after a bloody siege at the beginning of the war, while Tetiana spent "every summer" at her grandmother's home, now in occupied Donetsk, until she was 15.

A volunteer combat medic - "I don't want to say no to military service, the number of wounded isn't getting any smaller", she says - Tetiana had been based in Kramatorsk until a few days earlier, but her Hospitallers paramedic crew was redeployed to Kyiv.

Undeterred, she travelled back east the day before to meet Oleksandr, a battle captain on deployment. On the day itself, the pair drove for several more hours, the final miles under continuous anti-drone netting, to make their wedding day appointment.

Ukraine introduced online weddings in 2024, a necessity in a war in which soldiers and their partners can be physically separated for months on end. The service has rapidly gained popularity in a digitally literate nation - 38% of marriages were conducted online in the first half of the year, according to Ukraine's ministry of justice. Though Tetiana and Oleksandr were together, the officiant was online.

The two met as recently as February, after she had reached out online, offering to treat him. Each already looks sure of the other. Oleksandr believes their shared understanding of the four-and-a-half-year war, forced on to their country, will bind them close, at a time when "there is a big gap between military and civilians". Her "experience in battlefield medical evacuations and so on makes it easier for us to understand each other," he explains.

Their adult lives have been dominated by war. Tetiana and Oleksandr are both the same age as Ukraine itself - 35 - meaning they would have been in their early 20s when Russian-backed separatists captured Kramatorsk and neighbouring Sloviansk in April 2014, beginning a war in eastern Ukraine that has never ended. Both cities were liberated that July, and only now has the front line returned, a dozen years later.

35

Years since Ukraine declared independence. The anniversary is now a popular day for weddings

6

People killed in Kramatorsk in the week of the wedding, as a result of 51 shelling attacks on the city

Proceedings begin promptly. Bride and groom hold their phones forward; the town's already battered Palace of Culture, a five-storey museum and landmark in the Soviet classical style, behind. They place a traditional embroidered cloth, a *rushnyk*, in front of them, though it will not stay down in the wind.

Oleksandr brings over two loose tiles, taken from the square's flooring, to hold the *rushnyk* in place. The newlyweds will take the tiles with them afterwards. It is not an act of vandalism but rather one of preservation, taking tiles from a square that was relaid six years ago as part of the decommunisation of what had been Lenin Square. Tetiana plans to break the tiles and make a mosaic with them.

Rings and vows are exchanged, a bridal kiss is shared, and the couple step on the *rushnyk* together. This is an act of egalitarianism; tradition holds that whoever steps on the embroidered towel first has the last word in the family. After a few more photographs, it is time to head indoors to the nearby Coffee House Bakery, one of the few businesses still open, though its owner, Kateryna Seledtsova, has relocated to Kharkiv and the cafe feels more like a shelter, albeit one with cream cakes inside.

There is a moment of worry in the cafe, because a drone has been spotted above while Tetiana is outside. But she is quickly found and, over wedding cake, the newlyweds focus on their plans for children. "Starting a family during the war is about hope. I think it's important to build something new, to build something beautiful, in a world that Russia is trying to destroy," she says.

"I think that at a time when Russia is trying to spread gloom and darkness, destroy us and frighten us, it is important to create something beautiful, to wear beautiful clothes, to do kind deeds, to help and look after one another, and to love one another. That is what Russia wants to take away from us."

▼ Crowds of mourners gather to lay flowers for the late king in the grounds of the royal palace in Oslo
PHOTOGRAPH: ODD ANDERSEN/AFP/GETTY

Norwegians mourn great moderniser King Harald V as son succeeds to throne

Jon Henley
Europe correspondent

Thousands of Norwegians have gathered to pay their respects to King Harald V, Europe's oldest reigning monarch, who has died aged 89 in Oslo. He was succeeded immediately by his son, King Haakon VIII.

The new king thanked "the government and Norwegian people for their support and sympathy for the royal family at this time". A period of national mourning was announced as crowds left wreaths and messages outside the royal palace in Oslo.

Flags around the country were lowered to half mast and church bells rang out at midday. "An era has ended. A new one begins. The king is dead. Long live the king," the prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, said after meeting the new king.

Haakon, whose wife, Mette-Marit, has recently come under scrutiny over scandals including a much-criticised association with the late US child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, formally notified the government of his father's death yesterday morning.

Haakon, 53, told the cabinet at an extraordinary council of state that he would take the name Haakon VIII, as expected. He also chose as his personal motto: "Everything for Norway."

▲ Harald was a stabilising figure in a turbulent period for the royal family

The new king will swear an oath of accession in parliament within the next few days. Coronation ceremonies were abolished in Norway more than a century ago, but Haakon could choose to have his reign blessed at a consecration ceremony.

On Thursday the palace said Harald's health had deteriorated and that the king, who was considered a unifying and stabilising figure amid a string of recent family scandals, was in an "extremely serious" condition.

Støre said he had received news of the king's death "with deep sadness", adding: "A whole nation is in mourning, and the people of Norway are left with a deep sense of gratitude for a long life in the service of Norway." Royalty across Europe sent their condolences. Spain's royal family hailed Harald's "responsibility, dignity, humility and tireless dedication", and Denmark's King Frederik and Queen Mary said he was "loved like few others".

King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden said: "I wish my dear godson Haakon, who now succeeds his father as head of state, success and good fortune."

Belgium's royal family recalled Harald's "humour, humanity and sincerity", while Britain's King Charles mourned the loss of his "dear cousin", who guided his country with "warmth and humility".

Germany's chancellor, Friedrich Merz, said Norway had "lost a great figure who stood for prudence and unity", and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, expressed "deep sadness".

Harald, who had been the ceremonial head of state since 1991, was treated in Oslo's University hospital for haemolytic anaemia, a condition caused by an abnormally rapid destruction of red blood cells. Despite numerous health problems he had always ruled out abdicating.

His death comes at a turbulent time for Norway's royal family. Documents published in the US in January showed that Mette-Marit corresponded with Epstein between 2011 and 2014, long after he was convicted.

> *'People [have] a deep sense of gratitude for a long life in the service of Norway'*
>
> **Jonas Gahr Støre**
> *Prime minister*

The files appeared to contain almost 1,000 mentions of Mette-Marit, including intimate exchanges. They drew fierce public criticism, with Støre accusing her of "poor judgment". Mette-Marit apologised via the royal household, expressing her "deepest regret for my friendship with Jeffrey Epstein".

In June, Marius Borg Høiby, 29, Mette-Marit's son from a previous relationship, was sentenced to four years in prison for two rapes and 32 other charges, including violence against a former partner. He has appealed.

The scandals have affected public support for Norway's monarchy. A poll in February found support was down to 54%, from 72% in 2024. Several polls found nearly half of the population felt Mette-Marit could not become queen.

Harald was considered the Norwegian monarchy's great moderniser, revamping the crown estates and changing the way the court was run. He married Sonja, a commoner, in 1968. A great-great-grandchild of Britain's Queen Victoria, he succeeded his father, Olav V, at 54 after studying at Oxford and representing his country in sailing events at the Tokyo, Mexico City and Munich Olympics. He was widely appreciated in Norway for his commitment to national unity.

In a widely praised 2016 speech, he lauded diversity, tolerance and LGBTQ+ rights, saying Norwegians came from Afghanistan and Pakistan, believed "in God, in Allah and in nothing", and included "girls who love girls, boys who love boys and girls and boys who love each other".

Mette-Marit, 53, who has a serious lung disease, was a single mother to Høiby when her engagement to Norway's crown prince was announced in late 2000.

Outcry greets reports that US is in talks to gain access to Venezuelan oil

Tom Phillips
Latin America correspondent

Reports that the US is preparing to claim a major stake in Venezuela's huge energy reserves have prompted an outcry, with critics describing the move as "predatory" and a "rapacious" land grab.

Several media outlets this week reported that the Trump administration - which abducted Venezuela's authoritarian president, Nicolás Maduro, in January and has steered the South American country ever since - hoped to secure long-term access to its oil and gas fields.

Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves with an estimated 303bn barrels, compared with Saudi Arabia's 268bn and Iran's 208bn.

On Thursday, the Wall Street Journal said Trump officials were in "advanced talks" with Venezuelan officials to take "a direct stake in more than a dozen oil fields" containing 90bn barrels, nearly a third of Venezuela's energy reserves.

"This is real and being discussed at the highest levels of the US and Venezuelan governments," a source told Reuters, which said the fields being negotiated were in the Orinoco Belt and Lake Maracaibo regions.

Axios claimed the deal would be "a legacy-defining moment for President Trump", with one official telling the US outlet: "Calling this deal huge would be an understatement."

Citing sources familiar with negotiations, Bloomberg said one deal under discussion was a 100-year-lease on several oil fields.

The reports caused unease and anger among members of Venezuela's opposition who are already up in arms about Trump's failure to bring about genuine political change after capturing Maduro.

"It's a land grab," said one well-known opposition figure who asked not to be named. "It's revolting ... This is not the United States of the Marshall plan. This is a rapacious, mafioso United States," they added.

Since January's special forces raid on Caracas, Venezuela has been led by interim president, Delcy Rodríguez, Maduro's vice-president and minister of petroleum. Other key members of Maduro's regime are still in positions of power including the interior minister, Diosdado Cabello, who has been collaborating with Trump officials - despite a $25m (£18.5m) US bounty on his head for alleged drug trafficking.

Ricardo Hausmann, an exiled former minister, wrote on X: "An illegitimate interim government with an illegitimate hydrocarbons law has no legitimacy to strike this unconstitutional deal. It will be a fiasco."

The economist Francisco Rodríguez urged Venezuela's national assembly to reject what he called a "predatory deal".

Butcher of Bosnia Mladić's grim legacy still divides the Balkans

Kim Willsher

To most of the world, he was and will always be the "Butcher of Bosnia" - a grim epithet but one that somehow still fails to fully convey the evil and horror inflicted by Gen Ratko Mladić, who died in prison on Thursday.

As commander of the Bosnian Serb forces he was responsible for the massacre of an estimated 100,000 men, women and children during the savage breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He was most notoriously the architect of ethnic cleansing and the genocide at Srebrenica in which at least 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were slaughtered.

Thirty-one years after the Dayton agreement ended the Bosnian conflict and the 1,425-day siege of Sarajevo - the longest in modern warfare - Mladić is dead, but his legacy still divides the Balkans.

Džemil Hodžić was 12 when his brother Amel, 16, was killed by a sniper while playing tennis in Sarajevo in May 1995. "As kids, Mladić was a kind of horror creature. Everyone knew him and his name. We were very well aware that he was responsible for our situation and the suffering we were going through," said Hodžić, now 43 and founder of the Sniper Alley photo project in Sarajevo.

"Perhaps we were too young to comprehend everything, but children living through the Sarajevo siege knew the shootings by snipers, the shelling of our schools, the killing of our friends and family ... was down to him."

Zoran Kusovać, a Croatian journalist and geopolitical analyst who reported on the Balkan wars, met Mladić several times, once on a plateau overlooking Sarajevo where Bosnian Serb forces had installed heavy artillery. During the siege of the Bosnian capital they killed more than 11,000 people, including 2,000 children, in a daily campaign of shelling, bombing and sniping.

"We were up on the mountain and Mladić said to me: 'Look, I have Sarajevo in the palm of my hand. I can either destroy it or take it whenever I want,'" Kusovać said. "He was a bully and nobody, not even his superiors, had the guts to tell him he was wrong. He also kept meticulous notes of what he did ... he wrote everything down with the absolute confidence of a man who believed he would never be held responsible for it."

As well as those killed in Bosnia in the 1992-94 conflict, up to 50,000 women and girls were raped and 2.7 million people displaced.

Srebrenica is one of the international community's most shameful failures . The Bosnian town, its mainly Muslim population swollen by refugees, was declared a UN "safe haven" and locals told to hand all weapons to peacekeepers. The UN then abandoned it.

▲ *The 'Butcher of Bosnia' died while serving a life sentence for war crimes*

To many Serbians, Mladić was a hero who believed in a mythical "Greater Serbia" but was traduced in an international campaign against Serbs who still feel misunderstood and victimised. On Thursday, the Serbian government in Belgrade once again defied condemnation as it said Mladić, who died while serving a life sentence for war crimes and crimes against humanity, would be buried with "all the military and state honours to which he is entitled".

The ultranationalist politician Vojislav Šešelj said: "Mladić fought against those villains [at The Hague] for a long time; they expected his death two or three years ago, but he did not give up."

The office of the UN secretary general, António Guterres, told those in power to "refrain from denying the seriousness of the crimes", particularly the Srebrenica genocide, or glorifying war crimes.

Emir Suljagić is the director of the Srebrenica Memorial, and one of only a handful of men and boys to escape Srebrenica. "The people he sent to their deaths never had the chance to grow old. That is the only fact about his death that matters to me," Suljagić told the Dnevni Avaz newspaper.

"Now the hardest part of the job remains: not to let the truth, responsibility and memory die with him. Mladić's death is another moment in which we must decide what we will remember and, more importantly, what we will not allow to be erased."

▶ *Džemil Hodžić with his father, Bajro, at the funeral of his brother Amel, killed by a sniper during the siege of Sarajevo*

The 200-carat necklace has 673 diamonds

Necklace on loan to Vienna museum stolen by pair in view of witnesses

Deborah Cole
Berlin

Austrian police are hunting two men who stole a 200-carat platinum necklace encrusted with 673 diamonds that was on loan to a Vienna museum and once belonged to Egyptian royalty.

Authorities released pictures of the suspects captured by security cameras during the heist at the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), amid a rash of spectacular smash-and-grab thefts from European cultural institutions.

The unmasked men bought tickets to the exhibition before shattering a glass display case with a hammer in front of witnesses during opening hours on Thursday afternoon and making off with the historic piece. In an appeal for information from the public, police said: "The perpetrators fled with the jewellery in an unknown direction."

Officers fanned out through the city centre and deployed a police tracking dog to search for the suspects. The Kronen newspaper said investigators believe the men were probably carrying out a "contract job" on behalf of a criminal gang.

MAK said the piece had been snatched from a jewellery exhibition that had been on display since June, featuring more than 300 works by the French designers Van Cleef & Arpels. No one was hurt.

Notes for the show said the necklace once belonged to Queen Consort Nazli of Egypt, who wore it at the 1939 wedding of her daughter Fawzia to Iran's then crown prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who later became shah. The necklace was sold by Sotheby's in New York in 2015 for $4.3m.

The MAK said the exhibition brought together about 200 "unique and rarely seen objects" from its own collection and pieces spanning the 120-year history of the Parisian jewellery house, from the Van Cleef & Arpels patrimonial collection.

A guided tour planned for yesterday was listed as "cancelled" on the museum website and the exhibition, which was due to end on 27 September, was temporarily closed.

A report this month by Europol found robberies at European museums were becoming more violent, with thieves brandishing guns, assaulting staff and using sledgehammers, axes and even explosives to smash their way to targeted loot.

Please don't rearrange our shoes on arrival, say Japan paramedics

Gavin Blair
Tokyo

Etiquette, manners and consideration for others are integral pillars of Japanese society but there are times when they might go a step too far, according to emergency services.

The fire department in the central city of Kanazawa has urged people not to tidy up the shoes that paramedic crews have taken off when entering a house, warning it could hinder their ability to get in or out quickly, particularly when carrying someone on a stretcher.

In an Instagram video that has amassed more than half a million views since it was posted on 5 August, the firefighters demonstrate how paramedics leave their shoes positioned at entrances in precise spots, so that three stretcher bearers can step straight into them without shaking the patient around, or risking dislodging their oxygen mask.

It is customary for homeowners to rearrange the shoes of guests to face the doorway so that they can slip them on easily when they leave.

▲ *A video explains why paramedics place their shoes at specific points*

Interviewed by TBS News Dig this week, firefighter Daisuke Yamashita said: "Emergency crews decide the direction of their shoes according to their roles, so if someone changes their position out of kindness, it can interfere with putting them back on and delay the transport of the patient. From our experience, it can result in a loss of about 30 seconds."

Most of the comments underneath the video expressed gratitude. One user suggested that strict etiquette could perhaps be forsaken at such times: "It's an emergency. I would just tell them: 'Please step inside with your shoes on!'"

Ebola outbreak

Trust is key to fighting disease, says health chief

▼ *A Unicef team with banners and a megaphone raise awareness among people at Alanine market, Goma*

PHOTOGRAPH: DANIEL BUUMA/GETTY

Tracy McVeigh

The statistics, says the man responsible for overseeing the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), are meaningless. That it is the largest outbreak, the most deadly strain, that 100 days have passed, that the death rates keep climbing, says Prof Pierre Akilimali, should never detract from the human tragedies at the centre of this virus.

"It is behind those numbers that matters; the father, the child, the loved relative. Behind every case is a person and behind every person is a family. For us Congolese, we hold on to that as we work."

Akilimali, of the DRC's National Public Health Institute, and the incident manager of the country's multi-agency response, is certain the numbers will continue to rise. As of 24 August, the Bundibugyo variant of the virus had 5,656 confirmed cases and 2,715 deaths. "Let's say in two months we will reach the peak and start seeing a decrease, but this is guesswork," said Akilimali. "The honest thing is that we do not yet know. As we are improving community engagement we expect to have more confirmed cases, so we need to be sure that treatment centres are able to cope."

Akilimali, like most Congolese health workers involved in the Ebola response since the outbreak was officially declared in May, has been working flat out. He spoke to the Guardian on a rare day off, his first in months, but had to delay the interview several times to take urgent, work-related calls.

"Rest is not an easy thing for the Ebola workers to find," the doctor said. "Many of my colleagues have been away from their own families for long periods. What carries me and the team is the simple knowledge that every contact followed, every family supported, is a life where the worst was avoided."

There is particular concern over the risk of the virus crossing borders - Uganda has just been declared Ebola free after several cases emerged there - but efforts seem to have contained the spread.

That brings little comfort, however, for the people of eastern DRC, a region exhausted by years of war, neglect, resource-stripping and underdevelopment. This is the 17th outbreak since Ebola was identified in 1976. As the virus is transmitted from animals to people, Ebola usually begins in remote areas where people and wildlife live closer together and where health authorities have few outposts. People here are suspicious and distrustful. There have been attacks on clinics, and on healthcare and burial workers.

Akilimali said: "Communities have lived through a great deal - periods when the response did not always arrive, of confusing information, and the fear that comes with a disease that is frightening and carries a high toll. It would be wrong of us to be surprised that some people hesitated at the start - that is not ignorance; in most cases it is the understandable fruit of hard experience, including experience of institutions letting them down."

But things have been changing. "We have seen openness and cooperation grow. But mistrust does not disappear overnight, and we cannot count it out. Complacency about community mistrust is more dangerous than the mistrust itself.

"The response belongs first to our own institutions - the Ministry of Public Health and the Institut National de Recherche Biomédicale - and my work sits firmly inside that national framework." However, he added: "We need solidarity. This outbreak will cost a lot of the DRC government. So we need support from the regional and international community."

Teams on the ground also face a struggle in convincing people it is still safe to visit clinics and doctors for other conditions. "An outbreak response that destroys the rest of the health system is a response that has failed, and we intend not to do that," Akilimali said.

Even bringing in cash for workers' wages has been problematic and led to people going unpaid for long periods.

"What is making us a little uncomfortable is when foreign organisations say 'oh, we are bringing all this money but this money is not reaching the ground' - it's not true when people say this. Their money is not managed by local government or regional centres, it is managed by the NGOs.

"The community hears them saying they are collecting all this money, and think we are managing this huge amount, but it's not true.

"This can influence the community reaction and our work in the field. It was one of the reasons they were destroying the health centres; they were saying you are earning money from each death, you are killing people to push up numbers.

"This outbreak is serious ... and we are not pretending otherwise. But I would also say, honestly, that the situation today is not the situation at the start," he added. "Confidence in the laboratory has improved, our teams have access to areas that were harder to reach and the national institutions have confirmed their stewardship of the response.

"We are in the middle of a serious outbreak, being fought by people who have done this before and learned from it - that is the most honest framing I can give."

The things that mattered most now, Akilimali said, was finding every case and every contact of that case; keeping people safe and offering dignified burials; infection control in treatment centres; and building trust.

"Our community engagement is not a soft afterthought - it is as urgent as vaccine or any other technical pillar. Our approach is simple in principle, harder in practice: we do not lecture; we meet people where they are. We work through local health workers, community leaders, religious leaders and survivors themselves, because evidence shows that the voices people trust most are close to them.

"We explain what we are doing, we correct misinformation quickly and calmly when it appears, and we are prepared to change how we work when communities tell us what does not fit them. And we treat dignity and safety - including how families bury their loved ones - as frontline response.

"The biggest challenge is the scale and speed of the outbreak against a geography and a cost of reaching everyone. Every case that is found late tells us there is at least one chain we have not yet seen.

"One moment I come back to is a mother I met who brought her child to a treatment centre after others in the neighbourhood had been brought in too late to survive. She did it against a current of fear. It took real courage."

▲ *Health workers carry babies tested and cleared at an orphanage. Left, a worker at the National Institute of Biomedical Research in Kinshasa*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: GRADEL MUYISA MUMBERE/REUTERS

> ***'Complacency about community mistrust is more dangerous than the mistrust itself'***

Pierre Akilimali
DRC incident manager

Call for criminal investigation into RFK Jr after Guardian story

Michelle R Smith

A senior Democratic senator is calling for a criminal investigation into the US health secretary, Robert F Kennedy Jr, after reporting by the Guardian indicated he lied during Senate confirmation hearings in 2025.

Ron Wyden of Oregon said: "RFK's platform is built on lies and grifts that leave a trail of dead children in their wake. There are consequences for lying to Congress."

The Guardian's reporting was based on letters that were obtained - by the newspaper, along with Associated Press - after a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

Wyden told the Guardian he would be pressing Republican colleagues, who currently control the Senate, to issue a criminal referral of Kennedy to the Department of Justice for a criminal investigation: "And when Democrats retake the majority in the Senate, RFK will be at the top of the list of Trump officials the finance committee will hold accountable for endangering American families." Wyden serves as the top Democrat on the finance committee.

Meanwhile, the US government watchdog group American Oversight has sent a letter to the justice department requesting that it immediately open an investigation into whether Kennedy violated the law by making false statements to Congress.

Other Democratic officials called for Kennedy to be removed or leave office in the wake of the new reporting.

Wyden was among the senators who asked Kennedy during two confirmation hearings last year about a 2019 trip he took to Samoa, when Kennedy was leading an anti-vaccine group. Months later, a measles outbreak made thousands of people ill and killed 83 people, most of them children under five.

When asked about the trip by Wyden and Ed Markey, a senator from Massachusetts, Kennedy testified that his visit had "nothing to do with vaccines". The newly obtained letters contradict that testimony. In one, Kennedy explicitly told the Samoan prime minister he wanted to study the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine in the Pacific island nation; he used the words "vaccine" or "vaccination" eight times.

"Lying to Congress is a crime, whether or not the witness is under oath," said Josh Chafetz, a professor of law and politics at Georgetown University Law Center. "But this would require the exec utive branch to prosecute, and Trump's [justice department] is unlikely to do so."

▲ *Newly obtained letters suggest the US health secretary lied to Congress*

Attorneys with expertise in Senate procedure said that if the Democrats won control of the House or Senate in November's elections, they could use Kennedy's statements as grounds for hearings or an impeachment inquiry.

Markey also weighed in on the new reporting, saying the records showed Kennedy falsely said his trip had "nothing to do with vaccines".

"This is a pattern, not a slip. RFK Jr has lied to the Senate, lied to the American people and jeopardised the health of children to advance his anti-vaccine agenda," he said. "He should never have been confirmed, and he cannot be trusted to run [the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)] for even one more day."

Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland, a member of the Senate health, education, labour and pensions committee, which oversees Kennedy's department, repeated her call that the health secretary resign or be fired.

Hawaii's governor, Josh Green, a medical doctor who travelled to Samoa to help in the measles response in 2019, again called for him to step down: "It is clear that Kennedy misled Congress about his intentions in Samoa and his stance on vaccinations during his confirmation hearings two years ago. It is time for him to immediately resign," Green said. "He must do this for the safety and health of our country."

The Guardian sought comment from HHS but it did not immediately respond. In a previously issued statement it said Kennedy's visit to Samoa "was unrelated to vaccines. Any claim or insinuation based on these letters that Secretary Kennedy lied under oath or to Congress is not only false but outright defamatory."

Kennedy was not under oath during the two confirmation hearings. Wyden's staff said whether he was under oath is not relevant as it is a crime to lie during a confirmation hearing either way.

Iceland vote

Polls open on whether to resume talks to join EU

Miranda Bryant

◀ *Icelandic prime minister Kristrún Frostadóttir's Social Democrats back a yes vote to restart talks with the EU*
PHOTOGRAPH: SIGGA ELLA/THE GUARDIAN

For a long time, the prospect of becoming the third generation to run his family farm was an exciting one, says Davíð Clausen Pétursson. Icelandic farmers were starting to get higher prices for their meat and milk, debt was no longer such an occupational prerequisite, and innovation was on the rise.

Now, the 29-year-old is anxiously awaiting the result of today's referendum, as Icelanders are asked whether or not they want to restart accession talks with the European Union.

Davíð believes joining the bloc could have negative ramifications for Icelandic farmers, slowing progress and reducing profits.

Across Europe, small- and medium-sized farms have struggled, with thousands closing each year because of brutal economic conditions. In Iceland however, the picture has been somewhat brighter for some farmers because they have been able to make a profit and innovate.

Since the government announced that it was bringing forward the vote, amid Donald Trump's efforts to take control of nearby Greenland, the debate has taken in food security, national identity, defence, housing, inflation, language and resources.

The latest polls show the two sides - which cut across the political spectrum and generations - are neck and neck. According to Thursday's Gallup poll, the no campaign is slightly in the lead with 51.6% of the vote and yes on 48.4%. While the yes campaign has strong support, critics of the EU have been louder in part because a yes vote is less decisive - it is agreeing to begin negotiations, rather than a definite yes to joining the EU.

▲ *Supporters of the no campaign, which is narrowly ahead in polls*

"Of course I am quite invested in how it goes," says Davíð at his remote farm in Hvammur, south-west Iceland. "I want to build my life around farming for 30 to 40 years, and I would also like my kids to be able to do that as well."

He fears that uncertainty created by years of negotiations, before the nation votes again, will put a halt to all momentum in farming.

As he explained to his nine-year-old son, a litre of milk costs them about 100 ISK (61p) to produce, which they can sell for 145 ISK. Davíð worries that joining the EU would mean he would have to significantly decrease the price of his products. "It is not that I am against anything in the EU at all. I am half Danish, my mother is Danish and we of course buy a lot from Europe," he says.

"The regulations they have there are suitable for countries that live next to each other, but I am fearful that if it is a yes, the uncertainty will make it quite hard for us to see where we are going, so that will put everything at a bit of a halt."

Iceland's farming system was built on the country being a lone state in the Atlantic with unique weather conditions, he says. "We can figure it out ourselves. We make trade agreements with everyone around us."

He understands that high food costs are frustrating for consumers, but believes it is worth it. "There is a high cost to food security in Iceland. But there is an even bigger cost to being dependent."

The EU vote taps into a sense of lament among some in Iceland that, in a globalised world, the country's foundation in agriculture and fishing - central to life here until a few decades ago - is being rapidly forgotten. Davíð says that 30 years ago children came to work at the farm in the summer, but machinery and specialisation mean that is no longer possible.

Supporters of EU membership believe it could help bring down the high cost of living and inflation in Iceland, and would be good for the country's security.

At his home by the sea in Þorlákshöfn, Kári Böðvarsson, 79, a retired fisher, says he plans to vote yes despite being right-leaning politically. "It doesn't matter if you're on the right or on the left, people are just voting across politics," he says.

He is an outlier at his gym among his training buddies and enjoys provoking them - but will be glad when the debate is over. There is not much the EU can do to return power from the big fishing companies to individuals, he says. But perhaps it could help with housing costs.

At a public meeting in Reykjavík, the prime minister, Kristrún Frostadóttir, told attendees that joining the EU was a "unique opportunity" and "good timing" for Iceland's security - not just in light of the US but also China. "This isn't about being afraid," she said. "It's about being prepared and seizing opportunities when they arise."

Polling stations open at 9am today. The first results are expected between 10pm and midnight.

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Spotlight

The Saturday Read

By **Robert Booth**

Monty Python-like moments at China's robot games show humanoids are not fit to be humanity's overlords just yet. But, say experts, 'By 2030 it will be a different world'

▼ *A robot falls to bits as it competes in the 100m semi-finals at the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing*
PHOTOGRAPH: TINGSHU WANG/REUTERS

In a spectacular set of events including exploding pelvises, enough comic pratfalls for a Buster Keaton showreel and the occasional moment of ruthless violence, the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing gripped audiences around the globe this week with an unsettling mixture of hilarity, trepidation and relief.

The five-day showcase staked out China's claim to undisputed leadership in humanoid robotics, as android martial artists landed knock-out roundhouse kicks and robot teams marched into the arena heralded by flag-waving captains astride giant robotic dogs. The games' blue-riband event, the 100m, did not disappoint when one robo-sprinter ran quicker than Usain Bolt before slamming mindlessly into a padded wall in a blaze of sparks, flames and flying mechanical limbs.

There, in a 10-second clip perfect for the games' global online audience, was proof of what international experts described as China's "staggering" engineering progress, combined with comfort that the disintegrating robots might not yet be ready to become humanity's overlords.

"Ready for another big day of fail," read a typically schadenfreude-laced comment from one of the millions who tuned in to viral social media clips and live streams of events from boxing to breakdancing, in which the humanoids displayed a jerky mix of ruthless effectiveness and pathetic failure.

If the games had a slogan it might have been: faster, higher, funnier. The obstacle course involving humanoids scrambling under nets, down stairs and over stepping stones reminded the comedian Charlie Higson of Monty Python's Upper Class Twit of the Year sketch. "It's only lacking 'taking the bra off the debs' and 'shooting themselves'," he said.

Higson came back the next day for more. "They get better and better," he tweeted as a cheerleader robot wielding glittery pom-poms flailed around as though it was having a fit.

Others caught themselves experiencing unexpected empathy. One captioned an image of a robot struggling through the 400m obstacle race: "after drinking 4 bottles of wine at 2am". Another

Continued *on page 38*

Continued from page 37

found a weightlifting contest "way more emotional than I expected" as the bots strained to achieve their sporting goals.

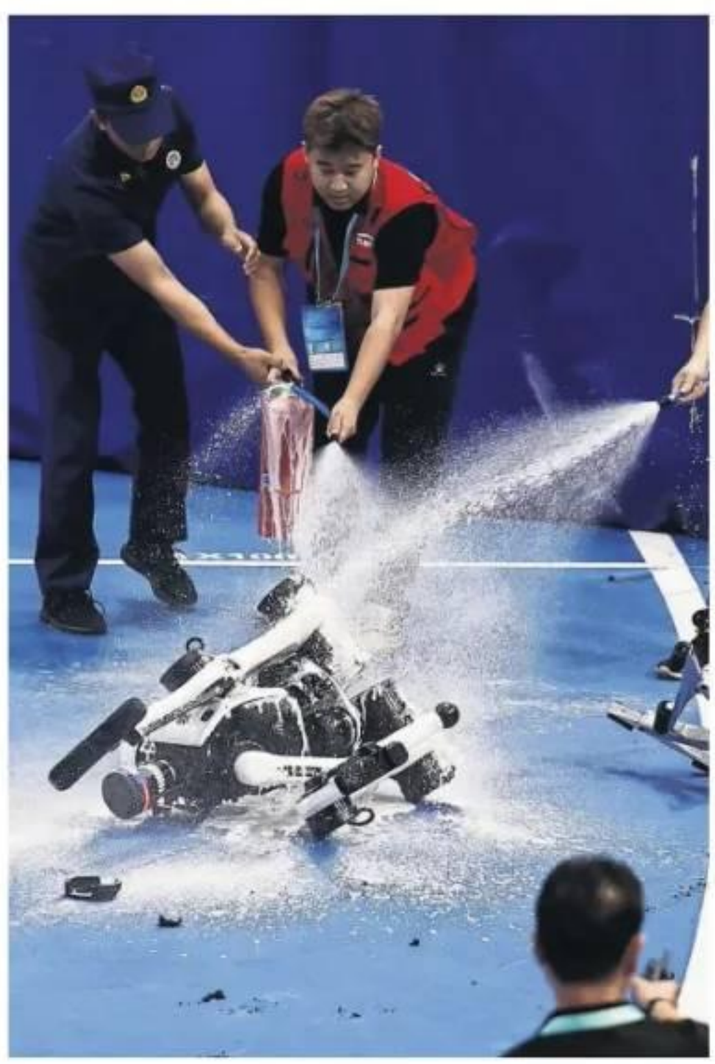
But the games were not intended only to entertain. Involving more than 2,000 humanoids built by over 660 mostly domestic tech companies, it was a propaganda flex of China's robotics muscle weeks before Xi Jinping, its president, lands in Washington for a summit with Donald Trump, where the superpowers' race to tech supremacy will be high on the agenda. Only last month Trump banned imports of Chinese humanoids and four-legged robot dogs, citing cyber and national security concerns.

The event was also a billboard to boost global sales of Chinese robots as US rivals prepare their own launches, notably Elon Musk's long-hyped Optimus humanoid, which is reported to have finally gone into production this month. Last year China produced 12,800 humanoids, about 90% of the global total, according to the Mercator Institute for China Studies - a dominance that perhaps gave China the confidence to candidly broadcast so many comic failures, which surprised some onlookers.

The event reflected the fact that, for the Chinese Communist party, humanoids are a high priority, offering solutions to a looming demographic crunch in the labour market, rising military ambitions and, as they walk more widely among the people, the state's desire to tighten its surveillance web. Beijing is fuelling an intensely competitive robot industry by seeding hundreds of companies to create an evolutionary survival of the fittest dynamic, with the games creating a hard deadline for competitors to demonstrate measurable progress.

Xi's latest five-year plan, approved in March, was studded with pledges to boost robotics industries, accelerate the "practical application of ... humanoid robots" and explore "embodied AI in roles experiencing labour shortages or high-risk environments", which probably include war. The military potential of the humanoids on display worried some onlookers.

"Fascinating, and honestly, a little scary," said Arun Bothra, a senior police officer in India, which is embroiled in a dispute with China over the countries' shared border. "Watching robots run, play football and compete like humans is one thing," he said. "Seeing them on borders some day, carrying guns and making decisions, will be something else entirely." Or, as another viewer concluded after watching a humanoid hoist a loaded barbell in the weightlifting contest: "Humanity is preparing its own end."



▲ *Robots compete in the 400m for small robots. Left, a humanoid robot that caught fire after finishing a 100m large-sized group preliminary race*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: ANDRÉS MARTÍNEZ CASARES/EPA

> *'Watching robots run is one thing. Seeing them carrying guns and making decisions will be something else entirely'*

Of course, China is not alone in pursuing robotic warfare. As the Beijing games progressed on Monday, Ukraine was staging a novel military parade in Kyiv made up of robotic weaponry and defence equipment.

But how to explain the numerous crashes and fits in the arena where the competition took place? Experts said the games revealed how China was making the most rapid strides in developing humanoids' bodies rather than their digital intelligence.

"The progress they have made from last year is staggering," said Thrishantha Nanayakkara, a professor of robotics at the Dyson School of Design Engineering at Imperial College London. "Everything seems to be coming together ... by 2030, it will be a very different world."

The fastest sprinter, Tiangong Ultra, completed the 100m more than twice as fast as last year, while the peak standing jump rose from 0.96m to 3.40m. Liquid cooling has allowed Chinese engineers to

Diary

increase the torque of the motors that drive their limbs, creating more twitchy and powerful force.

Ingo Keller, the head of robotics at the National Robotarium, based at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, said: "This execution is incredible. You would not have expected the speed of development. [But] does it move the goalpost in utilising humanoids? Not necessarily."

Experts stress that the games revealed progress in specialist, not generalist, humanoids: the robots were fast runners or good boxers, not both, partly because the AI models that govern their decisions are not yet able to process the physical world's complexity.

The industry talks about reaching a ChatGPT moment – a tipping point when humanoid technology becomes generally useful and explodes into the mainstream. By one definition, that comes when a robot can succeed at 80% of tasks in an unfamiliar home, instructed by voice or text. The event coincided with a sobering speech from Wang Xingxing, the founder of Unitree, a leading Chinese robotics company, who said it could be a decade before that happens.

"Humanoids are not yet capable enough for mass deployment," he said. "The limitations in the AI models that power robots' decision-making and interactions remain the industry's biggest bottleneck." Amid uncertainty about the impact of robotics and bubble fears, Unitree's share price has been oscillating wildly since it was listed in Shanghai this month.

Georg Stieler, who advises multinational companies on robots, said he did not see much progress in their autonomy in Beijing. He reported that some Chinese robotics companies were privately cynical about the showcase, complaining about a lack of funding for long-term pilot projects "to do something useful in a factory".

"It's not so difficult to make a stunt which people will share on LinkedIn or X," Stieler said. "The major challenge is to do something that's really useful."

Humanoid robot dexterity requires much more work. There was little obvious coverage of a Monty Python-esque category that included power-tool assembly, powder weighing, bottle opening, cap prying, box unpacking and picking beans using tweezers. One such challenge was briefly featured when the race track was occupied by the unspectacular sight of a humanoid struggling to pick up a small object from a table and spilling water in a pouring challenge. The cameras panned away to find a humanoid martial artist carving the air with kicks.

A wistful end to summer until the big school shop brings it all back to earth

Emma Brockes

Monday

Is there anything sadder than the end of summer? As schools go back and parents rely on the boosting effect of a return to routine, we look around for other ways to lessen the blow. A few things this year that might make it easier: the need for rain ensures that the advent of autumn is slightly less depressing than usual. People with attic conversions you could bake a muffin in will be able to use them again. And if you happen to be a woman of 50 or thereabouts, the fresher weather is ... a relief.

Still, looking down the barrel of dark nights and the slow descent towards Christmas clenches the spirit and I find myself pining for the very recent past. I think of this as micro-nostalgia, a form of self-indulgence that in this case involves looping back in my mind to the first days of summer when it was all still ahead of us. There should be a word for this particular kind of yearning, which might be described as: a wistfulness for past anticipation based on the certainty of future nostalgia. Even the Germans might struggle to find a compound to cover it.

Distraction comes in the form of the back to school shop, which, stupidly, I think will be nice to do the old-fashioned way. And so we take our actual bodies to an actual shopping centre, visit 700 shops, buy two lip glosses and some stick-on nails, then come home and order the entire back-to-school haul online. So much for nostalgia.

Tuesday

At the National Theatre in London for a production of Pride, the musical, which has been making people weep in the aisles since it first opened in Cardiff in March, and London in June, and will, presumably, continue to do so when it transfers to the Bridge theatre in Southwark this winter. I was ready with tissues but managed to hold on – just – despite the show's absolute best efforts to take me down.

If you know the story, which chronicles the solidarity between striking Welsh miners and gay activists in the mid-1980s, you'll understand the show's potential for poignancy and the stage production is, if anything, even more moving than the 2014 film. Part of this is because it leans slightly more heavily than the film into the Aids story. Towards the end of the show, Pride uses a trope popularised in recent times by Madonna, who in 2023, during her Celebration tour, sang Live to Tell while screens came down and images flashed up of all her old cohorts from the 1980s who had died of Aids and everyone in the audience lost it. The recently shuttered Broadway show Cats: Jellicle Ball, which celebrates the 1980s drag queens of Harlem, did a similar thing to stunning effect.

And it's not spoiling anything to say that Pride uses a similar method to flay the audience into a final state of sniffing, gulping and hiccuping disintegration as fallen heroes come up on screens in black and white – captured in a youth made more glorious by its horrifically truncated end.

Wednesday

Harry and Meghan fly back into Britain on Wednesday after six years in the US, and the world's media is treated to the thoughts of British people stopped on the street to share their opinions. It always strikes me how much better prepared the average American is compared with the Brits when called on by a passing TV hack to offer a spontaneous opinion. This was particularly in evidence this week as passers-by in Nashville were stopped for their thoughts about Dolly Parton, and were by and large effortlessly fluent, while those in the Cotswolds, where the not-quite-royal couple are reported to be moving, were required to say something sensible about Harry and Meghan. There was a lot of shifty body language, sliding eye contact and "made their bed and lie in it" commentary, which made me feel very fond of my people.

Meanwhile the Daily Mail dug up the term "Praetorian Guard," and raised, with relish, the prospect of the two brothers running rival courts, while the New York Times speculated on William's "silence" since his brother's return. Which begged the question: what, exactly, did anyone expect the Prince of Wales to have to said?

Thursday

Pushback against the forthcoming Ali G movie, Ali G: Who Iz I?, gathers force in the form of a petition – 34,000 signatures and counting – to keep the film out of cinemas on the basis that, under not very subtle cover of satire, it reinforces racist stereotypes. On the other hand, it may be the case that no petitions are necessary if Sacha Baron Cohen's 20-year-old vehicle strikes modern audiences as an embarrassing anachronism that is as bafflingly bad as it is crashingly unfunny.

Early indications aren't good. You might have seen Baron Cohen in character earlier this year, towing a camera crew to Centre Court at Wimbledon and contriving to get himself thrown out. Dressed in a white tracksuit with a marijuana leaf insignia that turned on a joke about the All England club's "grass", he did a piece to camera in which he joked that tennis was a "crap version of ping-pong". It's a short video I defy you to get through without hiding your face in mortification.

The other Baron Cohen characters haven't aged well, either. Does anyone want to see Bruno, a straight guy playing a screaming gay man that plays on a tonne of homophobic tropes? Borat was the best of the bunch, somehow managing to retain an endearing core that gave the character more humanity than the others and lacked what feels like the speciousness of Ali G.

Why is he doing this? (One can make a good guess). Baron Cohen has also directed the movie and surely, nobody wants it. If Ali G had a novelty value back in the day, he has long been replaced by characters like Diane Morgan's Philomena Cunk, who manage to send up dumb TV culture without humiliating people or trading in caricatures.

Friday

A good end to the week in the form of an outdoor screening at London's Barbican of the 1996 film, Beautiful Thing, an adaptation of Jonathan Harvey's classic coming-of-age play and a movie I must have watched 100 times back in the day. The film, directed by Hettie Macdonald and starring Tameka Empson and Linda Henry, Jamie's mum, killed me then and I assume will kill me now. This is partly down to the soundtrack from the Mamas & the Papas, and also to all those 1990s references – peppermint foot lotion from the Body Shop, anyone? – that feel so far removed they might be signifiers of a lost world in a JG Ballard novel. Of all the film's lines, it's strange what sticks and the line I keep thinking of ahead of the screening tonight is, "the whole of bloody Thamesmead can hear you!" More tissues.

PHOTOGRAPHS: YUI MOK/PA; HENRY NICHOLLS/REUTERS; VICTORIA JONES/ SHUTTERSTOCK

British Army road tests new 'scare-them-to-death' uniform

Spotlight

The week that was

1 UNITED STATES

Meta to pay $18bn to end landmark lawsuit

Meta agreed to significant changes to its Instagram and Facebook apps in a settlement that ended a landmark lawsuit on Wednesday. Dozens of US states had accused the tech giant of addicting and harming children with dangerous products.

The agreement curtails a major trial in California and will require the social media company to pay up to $18bn (£13.2bn). Meta agreed to establish safeguards for teenage users, including daily usage limits and blocks on night-time use nationwide in the US.

This is the first time in the US that Meta has been forced to change key features of the experience of everyday users.

The jury trial began with opening statements last week. As part of the settlement, the company denies wrongdoing.

3 PAKISTAN

At least 14 newborns die in maternity ward fire

At least 14 newborn babies died in a fire that broke out in the maternity ward at one of Pakistan's most prominent state hospitals.

The blaze began in the early hours of Wednesday and engulfed the ward at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, the biggest state hospital in Islamabad.

A statement from the hospital confirmed that 14 newborn babies in the intensive care unit died in the fire.

Dr Aneeza Jalil, a hospital spokesperson, told the Dawn newspaper that 15 babies were on the ward at the time and that one baby was saved by a doctor.

Investigators said the fire was started by a faulty air conditioning unit, which exploded inside the nursery where newborn infants were sleeping.

2 IRAN

Bill aims to criminalise foreign media contact

Tehran has taken the first step towards criminalising contact with foreign media, in a move human rights groups have said attempts to "sever the entire Iranian society from the rest of the world".

For journalists, researchers and even ordinary citizens, the proposed law being discussed by lawmakers could make speaking to international audiences and groups a potential criminal act.

Bahar Ghandehari, director of advocacy at the Center for Human Rights in Iran, said the new law risked turning Iran into an "isolated black hole".

"It is not simply an attack on journalists and citizen journalists; it is an attempt to sever the entire Iranian society from the rest of the world by criminalising the free flow of information itself," she said.

4 COLOMBIA

President announces immigration crackdown

Colombia's newly elected far-right president, Abelardo de la Espriella, has announced a crackdown on immigrants, ordering authorities to detain and deport people who are in the country irregularly or have committed crimes.

The millionaire former lawyer made the announcement last Sunday as the country continued to grapple with the aftermath of a 7.4-magnitude earthquake on 10 August that killed more than 300 people and destroyed more than 30,000 homes.

De la Espriella told a cabinet meeting last Sunday in Barranquilla, the Caribbean city that has in effect been turned into an alternative capital, that the first joint operations involving the police and the migration authority should begin "this very week".

5 HAITI

At least 47 killed in gang attack near capital

At least 47 people were killed and more than 50 others kidnapped when armed men attacked a once peaceful community near Haiti's capital last weekend, the UN has said.

A gang leader has threatened to kill the hostages if authorities kill any gang members as they try to secure Kenscoff, nestled in the hills above Port-au-Prince.

Last Sunday's attack pierced the belief that security in the Caribbean country was improving. Romain Le Cour, the head of Haiti observatory at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, said: "This is a major political and security test."

In a video posted on social media, the gang leader warned Haiti's national police director, Vladimir Paraison, not to use drones to repel gangs in the area.

The number of work experience placements being offered by Sainsbury's as part of a government drive to tackle youth unemployment. Around one in eight young people in the UK are not in work, education or training

10k

6 HEALTH

Shingles vaccine linked to reduced heart risks

The current shingles vaccine appears to significantly lower the risk of heart attack and stroke, according to scientists who say it could help prevent thousands of deaths each year.

The research, based on records of 70,000 people in the US, found that those who had received Shingrix had a 12% lower risk of a cardiovascular diagnosis in the following three and a half years. If confirmed, this benefit would be comparable to taking a daily blood pressure-lowering medication, the scientists said.

Dr Maxime Taquet, a clinical lecturer at the University of Oxford, who led the study, said: "If confirmed in clinical trials, vaccinating older adults against shingles could prevent hundreds of thousands of coronary heart diseases, strokes and cases of heart failure worldwide."

21%

The increase in revenues for Danish toymaker Lego in the first six months of 2026, driven by the football World Cup, Formula One and the hit film KPop Demon Hunters as well as its flower-based and Star Wars kits

9 FRANCE

Campaigners call for ban on marmot hunting

Animal rights campaigners are gearing up for protests and petitions aimed at persuading the French government to ban the hunting of Alpine marmots.

Open season on the rodents, members of the squirrel and groundhog family, begins in September, a few weeks before they go into hibernation.

Although the marmot is not a threatened species in France, its numbers are reportedly declining as a result of the climate crisis. Campaigners say they are opposed to them being hunted for fun.

Pauline di Nicolantonio, the president of the Association for Justice for Savoie Animals, which has launched protests against marmot hunting for the last two years, said: "The marmot is extremely popular and symbolic in the Savoie and elsewhere in the Alps."

7 GUINEA

Landslide at waste mound kills 30 people

A landslide at a huge waste dump in Guinea's capital has killed 30 people, the government said last Sunday, after heavy rains prompted it to collapse, engulfing nearby tents and shacks.

The incident occurred less than a week after the government announced plans to close the site and relocate the waste because of the threat it posed, especially during the rainy season, which causes landslides and fatal flash floods each year in crowded, underdeveloped cities across parts of west Africa.

The landslide took place in the Gbessia commune of Conakry, according to a government statement.

Witnesses said the landslide was large enough to bury an apartment building along with more precarious dwellings.

8 UNITED KINGDOM

Britons to be told to prepare for emergencies

UK citizens will be told to stock up on tinned food and take steps to ensure they are prepared for national emergencies as part of a new government campaign to improve the nation's resilience.

The new campaign from the Cabinet Office will set out ways people can prepare for extreme weather events and potential attacks from hostile states, including stocking up on bottled water, sources said.

The aim will be to ensure most households have basic supplies and knowledge about how to cope in a crisis, in order to free up immediate government resources for the most vulnerable.

Planning for a number of disasters, from cyber-attacks to extreme heat and flooding, has increased in recent months after a number of incidents in the UK and across the world.

10 AUSTRALIA

Sydney muddles up Munich in medal error

Runners finishing the Sydney Marathon tomorrow will receive a medal showing the landmarks they have just sped past - plus one they definitely didn't.

In an Instagram post on the official Sydney Marathon account earlier this month, revealing the design of the participation medal, runners were told they would "find the story of the course" in the medals' details.

One of the "landmarks" on the medal is the Allianz Arena in Munich, Germany, rather than Allianz Stadium in Sydney (which the marathon route passes).

"A little too much international flavour has found its way on to the back of the finisher's medal," a TCS Sydney Marathon spokesperson said. "We're not going to run from it; it was an unfortunate error."

1,800

The number of people enlisted to pull the 360-tonne keep of a Japanese castle a little more than two metres closer to its original resting place as part of ongoing renovations

Issue of the week

Donald Trump's trade war with Canada

Jen Gerson, the Guardian

Canadians are exceedingly angry. The prime minister we saw take the stage in the wake of the collapse in trade negotiations with the US was a Mark Carney practically vibrating with fury. How are we supposed to respond when our large and once-admired neighbour to the south repeatedly threatens to make us the "51st state"? Or when Trump posts gag photos of the whole of North America covered in a US flag - provocations we're supposed to take "seriously but not literally", as if that makes these threats more acceptable. What does one do when one's closest "friend" and "ally" repeatedly threatens to disregard border treaties? Or when the US's behaviour aligns perfectly with the president's threat to use "economic force" to push us into becoming an American state? We don't want to be an American state. And even if we did, we certainly wouldn't want to be a state of whatever the US is choosing to become right now.

Andrew Coyne, the Globe and Mail

We are headed for heavy weather. It is highly unlikely that Canada will give in, no matter what punishment is meted out to us. And yet it is hard to see how the Trump administration could yield, either, precisely because of the admiring notice we have been getting elsewhere. In defying Mr Trump, we are setting an example for the rest of the world. Therefore it is likely he will try to make an example out of us. This is about much more than trade, in other words. Our fight is the civilized world's fight ... for reason and comity in the affairs of nations, against an administration whose worldview, and behaviour, is increasingly that of an aggressive dictatorship. Mr Trump, as [Mark Carney] has said, aims to "break us," a phrase with historic echoes. He has to now, or others will follow our lead. If he succeeds, then the world will be governed by nothing but force in the end. But if we prevail, then "broad and sunlit uplands" must surely await.

Rex Huppke, USA Today

Heading into the midterms, Democrats can confidently and accurately state that Trump's tariff obsession has hurt American consumers. They can say the Iran war Trump started has made fuel prices outlandish and hurt American consumers. And they can say the trade war with Canada will cause additional pain. In an election that will clearly revolve around affordability, Trump keeps making the Republican Party's already losing hand worse. I love that for them, personally. Part of me hopes Trump next announces a sliding-scale tax on all American puppies and kittens, with the highest rates applying to those who are the most adorable. Let's see if we can push the president's approval ratings into single digits and vote every lackey Republican out of office.

▲ *Simon Abkarian as De Gaulle*
PHOTOGRAPH: MALGOSIA ABRAMOWSKA/ PATHÉ FILMS/TF1 FILMS PRODUCTION

Film
De Gaulle: Résistance
In cinemas now
★★★★☆

Maverick French hero's very British bromance

Perhaps because it is based on a biography by an Englishman - Julian Jackson's A Certain Idea of France - this very enjoyable and gallopingly eventful biopic, directed by Antonin Baudry, has an element of amused detachment. The first of two parts, it offers a good-humoured though naturally sympathetic perspective on France's great wartime hero, played with martyred and faintly preposterous hauteur by Simon Abkarian.

De Gaulle is the lofty exile in London, refusing to accept the dishonour of the Vichy government and its capitulation to the Nazis, symbolised by Marshal Philippe Pétain (Alain Libolt) and Adm François Darlan (Mathieu Kassovitz). For reasons that will become clear, De Gaulle's own story is mysteriously intertwined with that of a hotheaded young patriot, Fernand Bonnier de la Chapelle (Florian Lesieur), who is De Gaulle's biggest fan. A tiny touch of comedy is part of what makes this resemble an old-fashioned 60s war film, although it has evidently taken until 2026 for French cinema to come to terms with its contentious national icon. No one here is cheeky enough to comment on the nominative determinism of a Gallic hero being called "De Gaulle".

His great supporter after the fall of France in 1940 is Winston Churchill, played with great gusto and charm by Simon Russell Beale - incidentally, it is a relief to see a commercial movie role worthy of the man. I can't think of any other film portrayal of Churchill in which most of his dialogue is in French; was Churchill's French really as good as that? Churchill's attitude is exasperated, affectionate and occasionally furious, but he recognises in De Gaulle a kindred spirit: a romantic maverick and patriot. Beale gives his extended dialogue scenes with Abkarian, genially quaffing champagne, a touch of Shakespeare. I wonder if the second film will include the legendary moment when De Gaulle is asked who the three most important Europeans are, and promptly replies: "Dante, Goethe, Chateaubriand." When asked about Shakespeare, he shrugs: "European?"

The film also breathlessly gives us De Gaulle's arrival in the UK after France's collapse, where he is cunningly promoted by Churchill as the true keeper of the French flame to undermine Vichy. He is given staff, a house and permitted to make BBC broadcasts rallying the cause of French resistance, for all of which De Gaulle is hilariously ungrateful. He then assembles a ragtag group of expatriates as his cabinet. De Gaulle impassively accepts the horror of Churchill's ruthless bombing of the French fleet at the Algerian port of Mers-el-Kébir in 1940, killing nearly 1,300 French servicemen, to prevent this force falling into Nazi hands. The film suggests that De Gaulle, with a ruthless realpolitik of his own, saw the importance of propitiating Churchill, while seeing Mers-el-Kébir as a judgment on Vichy cowardice.

Then we get the high comedy of De Gaulle's chaotic personal adventures in Africa, finding support for his Free French in Chad and Cameroon, which Churchill admires as audacious if absurd. But Africa is important. An Anglo-Hollywood movie might have seen Britain's turning point in the war as a matter of dramatising Montgomery's brilliance at El-Alamein. This French movie instead emphasises the heroism of an outnumbered Free French brigade in the desert at Bir Hakeim under Gen Marie-Pierre Kœnig (Benoît Magimel); inspired by De Gaulle, they hold out against Rommel's superior forces, giving British forces a chance to retreat and regroup.

And so De Gaulle falls in and out of favour with the British, who are nervous that the comic opera of his political career in London will undermine the UK in the eyes of US president Franklin D Roosevelt (Campbell Scott). And the film shows us De Gaulle and Churchill's differing views of the American saviour. The film rattles along with De Gaulle's return to the inner circles of allied power after sensational events in Africa - and stops. The second film will presumably take the story on from there. But this one, entertainingly, is a kind of bromance or double-act with Churchill, a wartime duo heading for glory and then the long fadeout of post-imperial peacetime.

Peter Bradshaw

Theatre
As You Like It
Shakespeare's Globe, London
★★★☆☆

Rococo romp brings out the Bard's cheek and charm

For a play that pivots around the liberating disguises inside Arden's bucolia, this production of the Bard's pastoral comedy begins the dress-up long before its characters enter the forest for their games on gender and identity.

Duke Frederick's court resembles that of Louis XVI's Versailles, with flamboyant gesticulations that seem to belong to Molière. It is Shakespeare, but it could be a French period romp. Costumes become plainer and more earthy in Arden. Is there a suggestion that these characters live their courtly lives in a constant state of disguise?

It is probably not as deep as that in Sean Holmes and Charlie Josephine's production, which seems to put great comic merriment above all else. The costumes appear an aesthetic decision, reflecting the pomp of a court. Rosalind (Lola Shalam) and Celia (Gracie Oddie-James) dispose of their enormous wigs and bustles in the glade, Rosalind replacing them with simple yokel garb as Ganymede, Celia still flouncing in Little Bo Peep costume as Aliena.

Many aspects of this production soar high, including the comedy, sublimely eked by almost every character. Touchstone (Jonnie Broadbent, bare-chested with lacy ruff) is a comic highlight; Jaques' (Katherine Pearce) "All the world's a stage" speech is quietly moving; and Shalam is a commanding Rosalind, full of charm and cheek.

Class delineations are made deftly through costume and accent but with no sense of overstatement. So Orlando (played by Josephine) has an estuary accent that points to his lowly position among his brothers and lack of schooling, while Rosalind and Celia look and sound aristocratic.

The forest has a stripped-down nature, with whiteboard backdrops on to which trees are drawn, first bare-branched but slowly coloured in to bloom. Paul Wills' set design provides so much of Arden's magic, along with the folksy musical accompaniment to Shakespeare's many songs composed by Katie Richardson. The occasional winding in of the audience feels clever too, including a singalong.

And yet you never feel Rosalind and Celia's closeness; the two stand at opposite ends of the stage as Celia declares "thou and I am one" after Rosalind's banishment by Duke Frederick (Colm Gormley), with a conspicuous sense of courtly performance that undercuts earnestness or intimacy. Later on, you do not feel Orlando's infatuated flutters for Rosalind as he nails his poetry to the trees. Josephine plays him flatly, with little variety, although their performance certainly amuses. Thankfully, Shalam carries their romance, managing to be both arch and excitable in her passion.

And although the comedy entertains, it takes away the play's subversive edges, from the same-sex infatuation between Orlando and Ganymede to the alternative model for living that Duke Senior (also Gormley) encapsulates in exile, which seems a little lost among the fun.

The production occasionally seems unclear in its action - although what you lose in narrative clarity you gain in hearty comic frolics. Its achievement is ultimately this, along with its originality, which works a transformative kind of magic in itself, turning a familiar drama into something weirdly fresh.

Arifa Akbar
Until 25 October

▼ *Merriment above all else ... Gracie Oddie-James as Celia*
PHOTOGRAPH: MARC BRENNER

3,000 songs were written by Dolly Parton, she estimated, from megahits Jolene and 9 to 5 to lesser-known gems such as Backwoods Barbie and the devastating Down from Dover

▲ *Home truths, tart remarks and off-colour comments ... Jess Fuchs*

Comedy
Jess Fuchs: Feral
Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Firecracking cattiness from a future comedy star

"No hugging, no learning" was the writers' rule on Seinfeld. Jess Fuchs decrees a similar stricture for Feral, in which she will learn nothing about herself whatsoever: "Really, I'm just here to talk shit."

That might get proceedings off to an underwhelming start, save that the Aussie's cynical shtick is delivered with tremendous oomph: a bracing celebration of unsentimentality from an act who tells it straight.

It's one of those debuts that announces a fully formed standup, a cert to be in for the long haul. Cocooned in feathers, Fuchs is an effervescing chatterbox of a comic, firing off tart remarks, home truths and off-colour comments in every direction. Arrogant yet quick to laugh at herself, Fuchs is loved by the audience as she pursues a Bridgerton-inspired breast enlargement, expounds on "pretty privilege" and writhes in horror at the thought of dating a 45-year-old man (she's 32). There's a wickedly unexpected joke about the relative merits, when dating, of seeking consent versus reading the room.

If you can parse all this for anything serious, it would be Fuchs's relationship with her own body, memorably described to this descendant of Holocaust survivors as "the type to survive war and famine" – and about which, as about everything, our host is admirably plain-speaking. Less serious, but very likable, is Fuchs's "over-identifying with the ship" on a visit to the Titanic museum in County Cork – before a clifftop walk goes wrong in the show's final chapter.

Perhaps because it finds our host more vulnerable and less imperious, that closing set-piece isn't quite as distinctive as the firecracking cattiness that goes before. As for the Titanic as a metaphor for Fuchs's malfunctioning life – well, on this evidence, good luck to the iceberg who gets in her way.

Brian Logan
Until 30 August

Classical
BBCSSO/Canellakis
Usher Hall, Edinburgh
★★★★★

Strauss's Elektra outgores The Odyssey

Christopher Nolan's film The Odyssey carries a content warning for "strong violence and intense mythological horror", but even its goriest scenes do not match what Richard Strauss produced nearly 120 years earlier in Elektra, whose special effects are confined to the 111-piece orchestra. The heckelphones, basset horns and Wagner tubas Strauss adds to an already outsized band make staging Elektra unfeasible for all but the best-resourced companies. But the extraordinary colours he draws from the orchestra and the storytelling he entrusts to it make concert performances particularly rewarding.

The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra played Strauss's most dissonant score with relish, responsive to Karina Canellakis's efficient, economical gestures. Brutal climaxes were suitably overwhelming, but equally striking was the refined string sound in occasional moments of repose. Clarity was exceptional, as whips crackled, flutes fluttered and trombones groaned.

All the roles were superbly sung, even the tiniest. Lea Shaw and Emma Morwood were outstanding among the maidservants who launch the action; Lee Bisset, a notable Brunnhilde, shone as their Overseer. Men often receive short shrift in Strauss: here it's more than an hour before one is heard. But Günther Groissböck's resonant bass made Oreste's nobility obvious from the first bar, even if Elektra took longer to cotton on, and tenor John Daszak introduced a note of camp entirely in keeping with the text's contemptuous depiction of Aegisthus.

The evening was dominated, however, by outstanding performances in the three female roles at the heart of the psychodrama. Karen Cargill compellingly charted Klytämnestra's breakdown, snarling and sneering without ever compromising vocal beauty. Vida Miknevičiūtė produced the concert's most radiant singing in her touching portrayal of Chrysothemis, a woman who longs only for the normality of family life. In the notoriously demanding title role, Ingela Brimberg combined seemingly tireless vocal powers with attentiveness to every textual nuance.

Everything was as impressively acted as it was sung: devising mise-en-scene without directorial input, singers deployed the small playing space with imagination and eloquence, highlighting the story's horrors with a focus that even the most elaborate staging – or Hollywood movie – would struggle to match.

Michael Downes

▶ *Snarls and sneers ... Karen Cargill*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW PERRY/EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

TV review
The Airport Chaplain
Netflix
★★★★☆

Gallant do-gooder tackles terminal emergencies

In case you were wondering, yes, airport chaplains really do exist. I doubt the lives of real people in the profession are as frenetic as those of this show's protagonist, Tobias Wallace (Hugo Weaving), whose existence is a testament to that old saying: "Not all heroes wear capes." Sometimes, they wear hi-vis vests.

Created by Elise McCredie and Jude Troy, and directed with jittery flair by Bonnie Moir and Tig Terera, this moreish eight-part series wastes no time establishing Tobias as a gallant do-gooder. He is a problem-solver, finding out-of-the-box solutions to all kinds of prickly situations, from locating lost baggage to transporting dead bodies. And sometimes, God forbid, he even provides spiritual counsel, such as helping a grieving son to deal with his father's death. But most of all, Tobias is a spectacular busybody, inserting himself into virtually every problem in the airport.

Trouble arises when Tobias's new boss arrives: terminal manager Mira (Shabana Azeez), who has not drunk the pastoral care Kool-Aid. During their first meeting, Mira isn't impressed when Tobias describes his role as "providing emotional, spiritual and practical support for passengers". Nor is she thrilled when he knocks back her suggestion to file a daily work report, before abruptly leaving the meeting citing a "spiritual emergency".

The stage is set for a good ol' fashioned war between management and an employee who views himself as absolutely integral to the viability of the organisation. And as much as viewers may instinctively side with Tobias, most of us will see some merit in Mira's scepticism, which gives her increasing desire to show him the door – a solid narrative foothold.

The episodes are pressure-packed, making the show thoroughly bingeable. Tobias is, of course, the glue binding the show together: Weaving – one of the giants of Australian screen and stage – exudes a great combination of gravitas and relatability. His presence has dynamism, but without any heightened quality that suggests you would never encounter such a person in real life. If my luggage ever disappears, I want Tobias Wallace on the case.

Luke Buckmaster

TV documentary
Rainbow Warrior
Sky Documentaries/Now
★★★★☆

Spies sink eco warriors in gasp-inducing doc

When DS Terry Batchelor received the call informing him of the whereabouts of the French couple suspected of bombing the Rainbow Warrior, he was eating a pie. The suspects were in Auckland, he learned, preparing to return a campervan to a rental depot. Batchelor gathered his team and set off in hot pursuit. And the pie? "Actually," reflects the retiree, peering at us over his moustache, "I hadn't started the pie yet." A pause. "But *I was about to*."

There is a lot of this sort of thing in this retelling of the events surrounding the July 1985 sinking of the titular Greenpeace flagship. That is to say: granular recollections, delivered by elderly men with combative facial hair, seemingly irrelevant in isolation but riveting and oddly comforting when viewed as part of a startling and frequently unhinged whole.

When the rusting former fishing trawler known as the Rainbow Warrior chugged into Auckland's Marsden Wharf, it was met with whoops and banners of the "WE LOVE THE FUTURE OF OUR KIDS" variety. Its mission? To head to the south Pacific and monitor France's imminent neutron warhead tests. *Oh no vous don't*, replied the French government, busily preparing to put paid to the activists' aims.

Enter Opération Satanique, a top-secret mission involving "the crème de la crème" of France's foreign intelligence agency, the DGSE. Chief among said operatives were Dominique Prieur and her colleague Maj Alain Mafart, who would pose as Swiss honeymooners in a campervan.

Significantly less fun is the bombing itself, which resulted not just in the destruction of the Rainbow Warrior but the death of photographer Fernando Pereira. Similarly shameful is the litany of lies and denials that followed, with the French government attempting to reduce murder and international terrorism to the level of scuttlebutt and paranoia. It's gasp-inducing stuff, even if the documentary is at pains to keep the mood fizzy.

Sarah Dempster

Business

'Winter panic': EU gas stores fall to lowest level in 13 years

Jillian Ambrose

Europe is on course to enter the cooler months with gas stores at their lowest level in 13 years, which has triggered "winter panic" among energy traders, experts have warned.

The EU's gas stocks were 63% full in the last week of August, well below the 80% average for late August in recent years and among the lowest ever recorded for this time of year.

At the current rate of gas storage injections, the EU is likely to enter the winter with gas stocks about a fifth below the five-year average, and at their lowest since 2013, said Greg Molnár, a gas analyst and professor.

"Low storage levels are naturally increasing the risk of heightened winter price volatility," he said, which could be made worse by "cold spells or slow wind patterns" increasing gas usage over the winter.

The UK may be particularly exposed to market volatility because it is one of Europe's biggest gas consumers but has some of the lowest domestic gas storage capacity.

Typically, the UK relies on imports of gas via pipeline from Europe or tankers from the US and the Middle East. Chris O'Shea, chief executive of the British Gas owner, Centrica, said this week the UK had "almost no gas in storage" for the coming winter.

The EU's gas stores have struggled to reach a watered-down target of 80% full by the start of winter, since the US-Israel war on Iran triggered severe disruption to exports of oil and gas from the Gulf region.

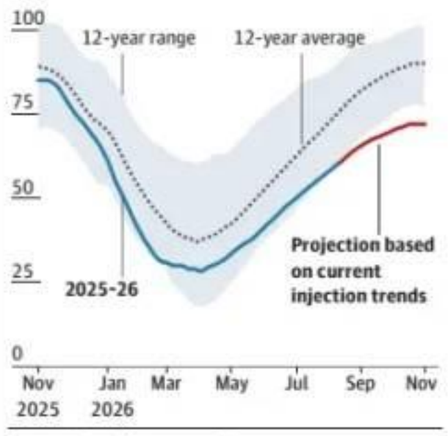
A cold end to last winter, and higher-than-usual gas power generation during Europe's heatwaves this summer, have also contributed to the bloc's depleted gas stores. In a typical year, owners of storage facilities fill them up during the summer when both demand and prices are lower.

Europe's gas market prices have "stayed relatively calm" this summer amid hopes that the strait of Hormuz would be reopened and winter stocks could be rebuilt. However, "no one expects it to happen any time soon", said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at Nordic banking group SEB. "As a result, the European natural gas market has run into a bit of a winter panic over the past week."

Although Europe is not expected to experience physical gas shortages this winter, traders expect higher prices. Benchmark gas price has climbed to three-year highs above €68 (£58) per megawatt-hour (MWh) in recent weeks, more than double the price at the start of the year.

EU gas storage is projected to remain well below its 12-year average

% increase on average dual-fuel bill



Source: Gas Infrastructure Europe

Prices have risen sharply amid mounting expectation that EU market traders will need to compete with Asian buyers for cargoes of liquefied natural gas as temperatures cool. Without the return of Middle East gas exports, Europe's benchmark price "would likely need to move above €100/MWh" to draw enough shipments of gas to meet winter demand, Goldman Sachs analysts said.

Gas supply concerns are particularly acute in western Europe, where storage levels are well below those in Italy and Poland, which have managed to top up their stores to 80% full.

In Germany, which has Europe's largest gas storage capacity, facilities are about half-full, according to Gas Infrastructure Europe, while those in Belgium and the Netherlands, which link directly to the UK gas market via gas pipelines, stand at 51% and 45%.

UK reliance on global gas imports is expected to deepen as declining gas production from its North Sea sector accelerates, and Norwegian output begins to fall from 2030.

The government is considering plans to provide direct financial support to safeguard domestic gas infrastructure, after an official consultation found that homes and businesses risked running out of gas within the next decade, despite growing clean energy sources.

This may include offering financial support to owners of gas storage facilities and pipeline operators to make it economically viable to upgrade and maintain them in the decades ahead.

The UK energy regulator, Ofgem, said this week that typical gas and electricity bills would rise by 4% from October under its quarterly cap.

Wall Street anticipates rate rise after Fed chair's speech

Gaya Gupta
Heather Stewart

Financial markets increased their expectations of a September rise in US interest rates yesterday after Kevin Warsh, the chair of the Federal Reserve, said if inflation remained high, the Fed still had "work to do".

In his first big speech in the role, Warsh said persistent high inflation had become "more concerning" and it was "the Fed's job to deliver stable prices". He declined to set out the possible future path of interest rates, but his speech was taken by markets as a signal that rates may rise in the coming months - a move that may put him at odds with Donald Trump, who has aggressively called for rates to be cut.

Wall Street had put a 35% probability on a rate rise next month before Warsh spoke, but that had risen above 59% by yesterday afternoon.

The Fed chief painted a relatively upbeat view of the economy that contrasted with some recent data, saying: "Both Main Street and Wall Street have been resilient."

The Fed's annual symposium in Wyoming, where Warsh spoke, has typically served as a platform for Fed chairs to offer clarity on the central bank's general direction. For example, the former Fed chair Jerome Powell foreshadowed rate cuts at his keynote address last year.

Kevin Warsh, the chair of the Federal Reserve, said persistent high inflation had become more concerning

But Warsh yesterday insisted the days of such "forward guidance" were over. "I believe that the practice has overstayed its welcome," he said.

At the central bank's last board meeting in July, three out of 12 voting members wanted to raise rates by a quarter of a percentage point - the first time in a decade so many members had shared dissent over a policy position. But a majority voted to hold rates - which currently sit at a range of 3.5% to 3.75% - steady.

Warsh has had to strike a delicate balance between managing an economy shaken by higher oil prices brought on by the war in Iran and not provoking the White House.

After hitting a three-year high of 4.2% in May, US inflation cooled to 3.4% in July - 1 percentage point higher than last year.

Long road from Brexit

North-east's recovery rides on Nissan survival

Jasper Jolly

In a factory in Gateshead, engineers carefully wind metal wires around iron cores to go in electric motors. Here, workers produce a smaller "pancake motor", which generates higher torque than conventional versions for supercars or construction equipment.

These workers form part of north-east England's automotive industry, which has experienced a long line of political disruptions, from Margaret Thatcher's efforts to attract international investment, through Brexit and now Andy Burnham's reindustrialisation strategy.

Across the Gateshead factory, which is owned by Turntide, more people are preparing tools to assemble 2.5-tonne prototype battery packs for Hitachi's hybrid trains, which are also to be built in the north-east.

The factory is one example of the ripples that have spread out from the centre of the area's automotive industry, the Sunderland car factory 15 minutes down the road owned by Japan's Nissan.

Turntide's business would not be here without its bigger automotive neighbour. Hyperdrive, one of the businesses combined into US-owned Turntide, secured its first batteries from a factory supplying Nissan next door. The smaller company shows why governments court big manufacturers: they bring stable jobs and can also initiate growth in the local economy.

Yet the situation is not so positive across the local industry. Four decades after opening in 1986, Nissan's underutilised Sunderland plant is hoping to build cars for China's Chery. The deal, which is still not confirmed, came at just

FTSE 100	All share	Dow Indl	Nikkei 225	£/€	£/$
+31.72	+16.28	-14.07	+273.58	1.1681	1.3575
10824.26	5842.37	53555.37	66405.56	+0.0018	-0.0008

SOURCE: ICE www.ice.com/data

◀ *Workers on the Nissan production line in Sunderland; right, view of the vast plant, which today operates at only half its capacity. Above, a production line in China for Chery, with which the plant seeks a deal*

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/ THE GUARDIAN; ALAMY; VCG/GETTY

the right time for Sunderland's workers, with the plant operating at barely half its capacity and facing a series of Brexit threats to its export-led model.

The Nissan factory opened as the keystone of Thatcher's investment drive. In Sunderland those efforts are mostly seen as a success: the first Bluebird from the plant takes pride of place in the city's museum. The factory produced 507,000 cars in 2016, just shy of the 510,000 made in 2012, and it was seen as the carmaker's most efficient plant internationally.

Andy Palmer, who was Nissan's global chief operating officer before leaving to lead Aston Martin in 2014, said the plant was "the shining star globally for Nissan in the manufacturing world".

The list of challenges faced by the global car industry over the past decade is long, with the pandemic and subsequent supply chain chaos, increased protectionism and the rise of Chinese competitors - all while finding cash to invest heavily in electric technology. But Sunderland's automotive industry in particular became a symbol of a difficulty specific to Britain's companies: Brexit.

The vote triggered a decade of political turmoil in Britain and huge uncertainty for carmakers over whether the Conservative government would pursue a "no deal" exit that would have led to the overnight imposition of tariffs on the UK's largest export market. Nissan was eventually granted £61m in secret state aid to invest in new models, followed by another £101m in late 2022.

The no deal outcome - seen as a catastrophe by most exporters - was averted, but car exporters still have to cope with twin Brexit threats this year. The first is from EU rules of origin that say electric cars made in Britain must contain batteries made in the UK or EU to avoid paying tariffs, and vice versa.

Nissan sources batteries from the next-door gigafactory run by Chinese-owned AESC, but the rules also require crucial cathode materials inside the cells to be sourced from Europe. That may prove too hard, so the automotive industry in the UK and EU is pushing for the latter to extend the rules of origin deadline for a second time. But some industry insiders do not expect an extension until as late as December, as the EU uses it for leverage in negotiations.

The second threat is from the EU's separate Industrial Accelerator Act, which will limit public procurement and subsidies to cars "made in EU" in an effort to protect carmakers from China. Factories in Britain will be locked out under the current draft. Nissan, which declined a request for an interview, has privately warned the government that Sunderland's future is at risk.

▲ *A worker at the Turntide factory in Gateshead producing an axial flux motor, below, AKA a pancake motor*

"It's not a slam dunk that Nissan will survive," Palmer said. "If made in Europe excludes the UK then I think it's existential for Sunderland. Sunderland will die."

David Bailey, a professor of business economics at the University of Birmingham, said: "Brexit keeps bringing up these uncertainties. The world is changing, and the EU responds to that, and that affects the UK."

The big carmakers in Britain are also lobbying hard on another issue the government is considering: watering down electric vehicle targets, known as the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate. The existing rules mean battery cars must make up 80% of sales from high-volume manufacturers, but Burnham's government this month announced the new target could be as low as 50%.

Nissan was an electric pioneer and has invested heavily to build its new electric Leaf and Juke crossover SUV models. Yet the company will welcome lower targets after reportedly shelving development of an electric Qashqai, wary of lower than expected demand for battery cars around the world.

It has also set its sights on selling new petrol cars beyond 2035, when they are due to be banned. Some analysts believe carmakers trying to delay the shift to electric are signing their own death warrants by ceding the market to Chinese competitors.

A Nissan spokesperson said it was "committed to a fully electric future" and that the mandate "must align with real-life consumer EV demand to ensure a gradual transition to full zero-emission vehicle sales while supporting the competitiveness of UK automotive manufacturing".

Nissan is undergoing a painful restructuring process worldwide, with the chief executive, Ivan Espinosa, closing seven factories and cutting 20,000 jobs.

If confirmed, Nissan will build cars for Chery, a part-state-owned Chinese carmaker that also makes the Omoda and Jaecoo brands. Nissan would still own the plant and employ the workers and would be able to use its spare capacity - it only managed 273,000 cars in 2025.

Some experts think there is little chance of Chery confirming the deal if the Brexit issues are not resolved. Yet the Unite union is pleased, arguing it would keep volumes up, thus preserving jobs.

For Turntide, the north-east of England still offers what it needs to try to grow its business. David Orgill, Turntide's vice-president of global operations, said: "Why not here? Why not in the north of England? The supply chain is fantastic up here."

Turntide's US parent company, backed by Bill Gates's Breakthrough Energy Ventures, BMW and Amazon, combined three UK businesses with the aim of expanding sales. It is expecting surging demand for its pancake motors (which are known as axial flux motors because of the different arrangement of their internal magnets). Based on talks with carmakers and construction equipment companies, it wants to expand production to 12,000 motors a year by 2028.

"We're expecting to grow significantly in the next 18 months," Orgill said. "We're actually able to pull back a lot of the capability and manufacturing back into the UK."

The survival and success of the Nissan plant is seen as politically crucial in the north-east and at Westminster, which partly explains why the government is indeed preparing to weaken the EV mandate further.

Even if the Chery deal is confirmed, the north-east's automotive industry faces a long road to get back to its heyday when Nissan was producing half a million cars. Yet it has got through tricky situations before.

"I admire the plant for surviving," said Prof Colin Herron, an automotive expert at Newcastle University. "The resilience of the people at that factory is incredible. Now they're entering a new phase."

Changing channel Will the TV festival survive its move south?

Robyn Vinter

The summer sojourn to Edinburgh has been a highlight of TV executives' calendars for half a century, allowing them an annual trip to the UK's most spectacular city during the world's biggest arts festival.

So there was sadness when it was announced that this year's 50th Edinburgh TV festival would be the last to be held in the Scottish capital.

High costs prompting concerns about accessibility - accommodation in the city in August is the most expensive in Europe - led the TV Foundation, the charity that runs the annual industry shindig, to consider a new venue last year.

Campbell Glennie, its chief executive, said the decision was about "exploring how we can reduce costs for delegates and make the festival open to more people". However, critics pointed out that while holding the conference alongside the Edinburgh fringe and international festivals made it so expensive, the chance to see world-class theatre, arts and comedy was a huge part of the draw.

Off the record, some TV figures blamed the Scottish government for the failure to keep the event in Scotland. Glasgow had initially been on the table, requiring only a 40-minute train ride west, but Holyrood ministers threw their weight behind a campaign to keep the event in the capital.

It was ultimately Manchester that had the winning proposition, backed by Andy Burnham, then mayor of Greater Manchester, who promised the necessary "infrastructure, talent, ambition and creativity" to host the festival from next year.

At Edinburgh's valedictory gathering, many delegates did not hide their disappointment.

One Scottish television producer said it reflected a problem in the industry where production companies south of the border have brought London-based workers to film in Scotland and failed to hire local talent. "It's a fucking joke," they added.

The TV Foundation said relocating would "radically reduce the costs" for attenders. The charity makes no profit from running the festival and instead invests the funds in programmes to improve training and widen access, with several sessions this year to tackle the class gap in the industry.

The scriptwriter James Graham used the festival's keynote 2024 MacTaggart lecture to lament how inaccessible the industry was for working-class people.

A subsequent TV Foundation report found nearly a quarter of TV executives are privately educated.

▲ *The actor Gary Oldman, who received a global icon award at this year's Edinburgh TV festival*
PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY DEVLIN/GETTY IMAGES

There is also enormous financial pressure in the industry. Traditional UK broadcasters are struggling to compete for audiences and advertising against deep-pocketed US-based streaming titans, such as Netflix and Amazon.

As British commissioners slash their TV production budgets, freelancers are bearing the brunt, making it harder to fund networking events like the TV festival. A full-price ticket cost more than £1,500, though there were bursaries and lower rates for freelancers, Scottish delegates and those under 30.

Adeel Amini, a freelance executive producer who founded

Coming soon: The Bayeux Tapestry, 2026 edition

Didn't manage to get tickets to see the Bayeux tapestry when it arrives in the UK next month? Don't worry, cartoonist Edith Pritchett has you covered. Look out for her exclusive poster, capturing the many battles of our times in her very modern version, from tech overlords to toxic trolls.

Only inside the Guardian's Saturday magazine on Saturday 5th September

The Guardian

the campaign group The TV Mindset to support casual workers in the sector, said: "The price of the ticket is already ridiculous." He praised the TV Foundation but said the conference itself highlighted how "two-tier the industry is", with a divide between those who pay their own way and executives whose companies pick up the tab.

Daran "Jonno" Johnson, the head writer on this year's SNL UK, spoke on a TV festival panel yesterday morning. It was between performances of his successful nightly fringe standup run.

He said the benefit of the two festivals being in the same city was that "so many industry people are suddenly in town" meant it was helpful "to have that pipeline between fringe comedy and telly".

Performers were concerned that their shows – many of which cost tens, if not hundreds of thousands of pounds to put on – might no longer have the same chance of being seen by commissioners.

However, the fringe was so integral to many TV executives' diaries that they would still be here if the schedules clashed, reassured Alex Cartlidge, co-director of Country Mile Productions. "The reason you're coming to Edinburgh, if you're a TV producer, is for the fringe ... if TV companies have the choice next year between going to Manchester or coming here, 99% of people will come here."

There is hope for those who do not want to see the link between the fringe and television severed. On Thursday evening, a new initiative was launched for 2027, funded in part by the Scottish government. David Smith, director of Screen Scotland, said : "It will be inclusive of TV, but it won't be a TV festival."

US judge rules Pentagon broke law by blacklisting Anthropic

Nick Robins-Early

A US federal judge has ruled that the Trump administration broke the law when it designated Anthropic as a supply chain risk this year, finding that the government had unlawfully targeted the AI firm for refusing to comply with defence department demands.

Judge Rita Lin's ruling on Thursday barred the federal agencies named in the lawsuit from enforcing Donald Trump's order to stop using Anthropic's tools and overturned the defence secretary Pete Hegseth's designation of the company as a "supply chain risk". The status, usually reserved for foreign firms, would have blocked government agencies from doing business with Anthropic.

The case emerged from a feud in which Anthropic refused to allow the government to use its Claude AI model for autonomous lethal weapons or domestic mass surveillance.

Lin put a temporary pause on the government's punitive measures in March. Thursday's ruling makes that suspension permanent, although the government may appeal.

Asda chief hails return to growth as 'huge milestone'

Sarah Butler

Asda has heralded its first trading growth in more than two years as the supermarket's boss said it was attracting more shoppers with lower prices and an improved online service.

Allan Leighton, the executive chair of the UK's third-largest grocer, said a 0.2% rise in sales at established stores, excluding fuel, in the seven weeks to 18 August was "a huge milestone" that was "psychologically important for the business". In the preceding three months, sales had fallen 2.3%.

"Our price position is strong, we are now getting more customers in the business and we have got some momentum online and that's been the biggest drag," Leighton said. The last time Asda's sales rose was in the first three months of 2024.

He said Asda's performance had been aided by more stability in its IT systems after a traumatic and expensive shift from the technology of its former owner, Walmart. In 2020 the billionaire Issa brothers and the private equity firm TDR Capital bought Asda in a £6.8bn takeover. TDR now controls the business.

Since the buyout, Asda has been struggling with falling sales and profits as well as a huge debt pile, while paying out close to £1bn to revamp its IT systems. Leighton returned to help turn around the business for the second time in his career in November 2024 after a 20-year absence.

Despite inflation on groceries in the UK, Asda's sales had been falling as the problems with its technology meant it struggled to keep shelves stocked, while it also faced heavy competition from the cut-price chains Aldi and Lidl as well as from bigger rivals Tesco and Sainsbury's.

Aldi is now less than one percentage point behind Asda in market share and continues to grow at a faster pace, threatening to steal its rival's spot as the UK's third-largest chain.

Leighton has said it was not inevitable that Aldi would leapfrog Asda, as it is fighting back with measures including a deal with the online specialist Ocado to provide technology to improve its website and delivery systems from next year.

"There is some momentum in the business and it is upwards and that is important," Leighton said. He had "never felt not confident" and Asda could be revamped as "the business is too good not to be turned around".

He said growth had been led by food, sales of which were up 0.7% at established stores for the seven-week period. Sales of clothing and other non-food products fell as, Leighton said, the wider market was tough, and the late August bank holiday had delayed shoppers' spending on back to school items.

Inflation on food is appearing in some areas of produce as the hot dry summer hit crops, but Leighton said Asda was managing stocks and pricing of petrol well.

0.2%

Rise in sales growth at established Asda stores, excluding fuel, in the seven weeks preceding 18 August

Money

Bank scams

'I've got £80k in my account. Here's the pin number'

Your phone rings and it's someone from your bank saying your account has been compromised by scammers. It needs details so it can help protect your money. Before you know it, the bank agent is telling you to move your money, or hand over your debit card for safekeeping. Unfortunately, far from protecting you from fraudsters, the person on the other end of the line is a scammer.

These impersonation scams are rife and costly. Santander says more than £3m has been stolen from its customers so far this year, with an average loss of £6,000.

Meanwhile, figures from Lloyds bank show that fraudsters posing as representatives of trusted organisations such as the police, banks, HM Revenue and Customs and phone providers stole more from its customers in the year to the end of June than in the previous 12 months.

While the number of customers reporting a scam has fallen 3% this year, the average sum taken rose 10% to £3,516. A third of these reported scams involved someone posing as the police or a bank.

Here, an anonymous reader details how he turned the tables, plus we highlight some of the scam's latest incarnations.

"A couple of Sundays ago at just past 11am my mobile rang. An automated message purported to be from Barclays bank, querying a payment to Argos for more than £1,000. Not only had I not made a payment to Argos recently, I don't actually bank with Barclays.

I am plagued with these kinds of calls. Usually, when possible, I make it clear to the scammers that I know their game. Usually, that call ends there and then.

But this time I realised there was a chance to string them along. It was just a question of how soon they realised I was bluffing. I assumed it would be a couple of minutes. In fact it was three hours.

I called the number shown on my phone and, pretending to be a confused, doddery old man - not that difficult for me - I expressed the expected alarm at the bogus payment.

The man who answered, who had more or less a received pronunciation accent, went through what I understand is the usual story: my credit card had been compromised, bankruptcy was on the horizon, remedial action essential. Someone from the investigations team would call me back, he said. Thirty minutes later someone calling himself "Adam" rang. From here on, in the number always came up as "No caller ID".

Several times Adam ended the call, presumably to consult with his fellow crooks, and rang back later.

First, Adam went through several security-like questions. When did I last use my credit card? "Can't remember," I replied. What was the last transaction I made? "Dunno." Did I use internet banking? "No". Then came the big one: how much is in your current account? "Around £80,000," I said. (If only.)

There wasn't a sharp intake of breath. I couldn't hear a licking of lips. But I could sense that Adam's vocal cords had tightened, and he was from now on more intense.

He explained it was a matter of the utmost urgency my credit card should be cancelled and a new one issued. Would I like to keep the same pin, he asked? I said "yes" and he asked for it. I'd already written down a made-up pin on a bit of paper, and gave it to him. I thought I could sense him trying hard to remain matter of fact.

He asked if I had my debit card and credit card with me. I said I couldn't find my credit card. Adam was stern, insisting I look for it. I couldn't be bothered to fabricate two false 16-digit numbers, and so

▲ *It's easy to be caught out by an unexpected call from 'your bank'*

How not to fall victim

'If a text or call doesn't look or sound right, trust your instincts'

Bank impersonation scams often begin with a phone call or text that claims to be from your bank.

It is texts that are largely favoured by scammers, says Elaine Ross, head of fraud analytics at Nationwide building society. It is easy to send many in one go, she says, and "a lot of people are more sceptical about people calling, than they are about getting a message".

Because messages are sent out randomly, one could claim to be from a company you have no financial relationship with. But if it does include your bank's name, it is likely to stop you in your tracks.

Often the text says a payment has been set up from your account and asks you to take action if you don't recognise the transaction.

Recent messages seen by Guardian Money show criminals saying you have paid a specific person or business. "It will be high value, and a person the victim doesn't know," Ross says.

In some cases the message will give you a number to call; in others will ask you to reply "Y" if it was you and "N" if it wasn't. "As soon as you press "N", they will call back and say they are from Nationwide's security team or the police. That puts people into a panic," she says.

Once the scammer has you on the phone, they will usually attempt to persuade you to move cash or hand over your card details - or both - for your own protection.

Ross says that if you get a text or call, you should pause before you respond and, if in doubt, speak to someone you know and trust.

Santander Text Alert: [redacted], a payment request of £829.32 at ALAN MOTORS on 2026-08-19 10:58:43 is currently on hold. If this was your transaction, reply Y and it will go ahead soon. If this was NOT you please call [redacted] straight away.

▲ *A text will often cite a high value, and name a person or business*

Chris Ainsley, head of fraud risk management at Santander UK, says: "If something doesn't look or sound right, trust your instincts. Stop, check and contact your bank directly using a trusted number."

That could be on the back of your debit card, or in your bank or building society's app, or on a statement or letter.

Lots of financial companies have set up tools to help their customers avoid falling victim to scams. At Nationwide, for example, if you are speaking to someone claiming to be from the building society, you can check via its app if it is a genuine call: open and go to the "more" section, then tap "call checker".

No genuine bank or building society will complain if you say you want to hang up and ring back.

If you try to transfer money, you should see security warnings about scams. Take these seriously, no matter what anyone on the phone tells you. ***Hilary Osborne***

Energy cap
How to save £173 a year by fixing a deal
Page 50

Fantasy house hunt
Homes with plenty of kerb appeal
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ILLUSTRATION: SEAN O'BRIEN

I told him my wife must have it and she was out. He let this go.

I had already taken out one of my debit cards from my wallet, one issued by HSBC, jotted down the first eight digits, and made up eight more. To my surprise, and some alarm, Adam read out the first six digits correctly, saying the card was issued by HSBC. (How did he know I had an HSBC account?)

He didn't bother to explain why he needed the debit card, too - or why he needed the numbers - and, being in character I didn't ask, just went meekly along. I guess the implication was that both cards were compromised and so the investigations team needed to cancel that one as well.

I gave him the made-up number, thinking this would be the end of it. But within a minute he came back and said the number I'd given didn't seem to be a genuine one.

I assumed concerned bafflement and told him that all I could say was that I was reading out the number on the card in front of me. There was another pause, presumably while he consulted one of his scammer colleagues. To my surprise they decided to keep going.

As this was Sunday, as Adam pointed out, the banks were closed. So the only safe procedure was to send round a courier to pick up my debit card - right now. It couldn't wait until tomorrow. Was that OK with me? I told him it was fine.

He said I should put the card in an envelope and address it: HSBC Investigations Team, what he thought was my name, Ref HS844677.

He was most insistent on two things: he repeated several times that the courier must, on no account whatsoever, be able to see that a bank card was in the envelope, and that I must seal it extremely carefully.

He insisted three times that I read the address back to him. I pretended to be getting a bit fed up with all this but he explained, quite firmly, that banking security was at stake here and there was no room for error.

A new thought then occurred to him. Did I have a current bank statement, and could I find the most recent one? I noisily opened and shut a drawer. He asked for the balance. I had already written down a precise made-up amount. I told him £81,224.93.

Adam told me he'd ring back when he had booked the courier and got an ETA. He'd already asked me for my postcode and I'd given him one where I lived several years ago. Now he asked for my exact address and I gave him a house number that I knew was too high to exist in that street.

Fifteen minutes later he rang back, sounding a little flustered. A blue Prius was outside the address I'd given but it seemed to be a block of flats. "That's not right," I said, "I live in a house." Another hiatus, as he communicated with the courier. Could I see a blue Prius? he asked. I paused long enough to have looked out of an imaginary window and said "No, I can't see a blue car".

What can you see outside your house? he asked. "Nothing," I said. He rang off again.

Five minutes later he called back. Would I mind going out and trying to find the blue Prius? I explained that I had a bad leg and couldn't leave my house at all. But I would gladly open the front door and have a look. Then another call. The driver was absolutely adamant that the address was in a block of flats.

I'd kept this charade up for a lot longer than I'd expected and I was about to go out. "Oh dear," I said in my best whispery voice, "it looks like I've been wasting your time."

What? I switched into my own voice to deliver the - unprintable - coup de grace, and hang up.

Adam even had the cheek to ring back later. I didn't answer. I wish I had. I could have thanked him for the afternoon's entertainment

Anonymous

First-time buyers

Don't delay, bag the outgoing lifetime Isa now, say experts

A new Isa to help savers get a foot on the property ladder is due to launch in 2028, but there are many reasons not to wait. **Rupert Jones** reports

If you want to start saving towards your first home, don't wait until a new Isa just for first-time buyers goes on sale. That is the advice from experts after more details emerged about a savings account the government plans to launch to help people get a foot on the property ladder.

The first-time buyer Isa is likely to replace the existing lifetime Isa in two years and is supposed to be simpler than the older account. However, it looks as if the financial benefits won't be as attractive as those offered by the current product, so there's no advantage in hanging around.

Why scrap the lifetime Isa?

It offers a very good deal in the form of free cash, but it also has some downsides.

You must be 18 or over, and under 40, to open one, and you can pay in up to £4,000 a year until you turn 50. The money in the account can be saved in cash or invested. It can then be used to help buy a first home, or withdrawn after age 60.

The government adds a 25% bonus to your savings, paid monthly, up to a maximum of £1,000 a year. Someone who "maxes out" the account from age 18 to 50 could pocket £32,000 in free cash, which, in turn, will be increased by interest or investment returns, thus further boosting their savings pot.

But the property you buy must cost £450,000 or less - a cap that has stayed the same since 2017, while house prices have risen.

Savers who withdraw their money to spend on a property costing more than the price cap face a 25% charge for an "unauthorised withdrawal". This is designed to recover the government bonus, but it also grabs some of the saver's original investment.

Many experts say this would be easy to fix by simply increasing the price cap and reducing the penalty.

Instead, the government has decided to ditch the lifetime Isa for new savers, saying there is evidence it "is not working well for many", and create a new account. It is thought this will not go on sale until 2028 at the earliest.

Until then, it will still be possible to open a lifetime Isa, and to carry on saving in line with the existing rules "indefinitely," the Treasury says.

Should I wait?

"For those starting to plan the next stage of their life and save towards a first home, there is little reason to delay if they are in a position to start saving now," says Rachel Vahey, head of public policy at investment platform AJ Bell.

"Taking advantage of a lifetime Isa could allow them to benefit from the existing government bonus - and investment growth on it - while they wait for further details of the new product."

There are other reasons why those in the industry are suggesting you don't wait. The first-time buyer Isa appears to be more user-friendly than the lifetime Isa: it will have no upper age limit and no withdrawal charges.

However, savers could end up worse-off than those who use a lifetime Isa. With the new account, the government bonus will not be paid at the end of each month but as a lump sum at the point when the individual is buying their first home. So you will be missing out on any potential interest, or investment growth that the bonus might have attracted.

And the bonus will be based on what you have paid in (minus any withdrawals) rather than what your fund ends up being worth - it will not take into account any of the savings interest, or investment growth that you will have enjoyed.

"For a saver putting away £333 a month over 10 years at a return of 6%, receiving the bonus at the end, rather than monthly, costs them more than £3,600 in lost growth. That's assuming a 25% government bonus," says Brian Byrnes, the director of personal finance at the wealth management platform Moneybox.

However, we don't yet know whether the new account will also offer a 25% government bonus, or if the annual contribution limit will also be £4,000.

We also don't know if the £450,000 property price cap will be increased on either Isa.

Can I move to the new Isa?

If you already have a lifetime Isa, or open one, you won't be able to transfer it to the new Isa. This is to prevent account holders earning two lots of bonus government cash.

You will be able to take out a first-time buyer Isa as well, although you will only be able to save into one type in any single tax year.

Someone holding both accounts will be able to use the money saved in both towards the same home purchase.

Transferring from a normal stocks and shares Isa, into a cash first-time buyer Isa, will be banned. Transfers from a normal cash Isa into a cash first-time buyer Isa will be permitted, as would transfers from a stocks and shares Isa to a stocks and shares first-time buyer Isa. However, if you do this, as opposed to taking out a lifetime Isa, you will miss out on the 25% government bonus in the meantime.

▲ *When trying to get on the property ladder both timing and counting the pennies matter. Best to act now rather than wait* PHOTOGRAPH: REBEKAH DOWNES/PA

Energy

Get a fix to save up to £173 a year on bills

Rupert Jones

With higher energy bills looming, and warnings of worse to come, households could save up to £173 a year by switching to a fixed deal.

Millions in Great Britain face the highest energy charges in three years after it was announced that the government's price cap will rise again in October. This will be the second increase in three months.

However, moving to a fixed tariff would help avoid the increases, and another widely predicted for January. These tariffs offer a set standing charge and unit costs, often for one or two years.

Gas and electricity prices will rise by 4% from 1 October under the new cap, after climbing 13% at the start of July. This will take the rate for 22 million households on default tariffs to the equivalent of £1,723 a year, based on typical gas and electricity usage, and will kick in just as many people will probably be turning the heating back on.

However, even the energy regulator for Great Britain, Ofgem, has gone into Martin Lewis mode, extolling the money-saving benefits offered by a fix.

"Savings are available by choosing a fixed tariff, which are available at £100 or more below the October price cap," it says.

About 11m homes (35% of the total) are already on one and so will not be affected by the rise announced this week. They will be protected from price increases until their current deal ends.

Price comparison websites say many households could save decent sums by switching to one of the cheapest fixes on the market.

Doing a quick check, using one of these sites, will show you what is available based on your personal usage. At the time of writing there are plenty of fixed deals that beat the new October figure, "offering households certainty over what they'll pay through the coldest months, regardless of what happens to wholesale prices", says Uswitch.com.

4%

The amount that gas and electricity prices will rise from 1 October after climbing 13% at the start of July

£1,550

Cost of a year's typical usage after switching to cheapest fix from Fuse Energy, £113 below current price cap

▼ *Experts predict energy price rises of about 9% in January* PHOTOGRAPH: DANNY LAWSON /PA

The cheapest is from Fuse Energy at £1,550 a year for a typical-usage home - this is £173 below the October cap figure, and £113 below the current cap. It is available in various forms: there is one that lasts for 14 months - Fuse Energy August 2026 Fixed (14m) V1 - being offered by Uswitch and Confused.com, as well as Fuse Energy itself.

Meanwhile, MoneySuperMarket offers a version fixed for 18 months, called Fuse Energy August 2026 Fixed (18m) V10.

There are several other fixes available from suppliers including Co-op Energy, Octopus Energy, E.ON Next and Ecotricity, that offer typical savings (versus the October price cap) of more than £100 a year. Some are exclusive to one or more comparison sites but, in many cases, you can get them direct from the supplier.

For those who haven't already done so, the advice to consider switching to a fixed tariff has been lent extra weight by the prediction that the pain is only going to get worse.

According to analysts at Cornwall Insight, bills are forecast to rise by a further 9% in January, just when temperatures may be at their lowest.

If that happens, the typical household bill will climb by £149 to about £1,872 a year. However, the January 2027 figure will not be confirmed until November, and a lot could happen between now and then.

Before you switch, check how long remains on your current contract and whether there are any exit fees, says Gareth Kloet at Go.Compare.

October's cap would have been even higher if the government had not announced a temporary VAT cut on domestic electricity. This will reduce the tax from 5% to zero between 1 October this year and 31 March 2027, resulting in a £45-a-year saving for a typical household (this has been reflected in the new cap). The cut will benefit those now on fixed tariffs, as well as those whose bills are pegged to the price cap - the discount will be automatically applied to accounts by suppliers.

You may want to check if you qualify for help, says Sarah Coles at investment platform AJ Bell. Initiatives include the warm home discount scheme, which reopens in October and is a one-off £150 discount off your electricity bill.

Consumer champion
Anna Tims

O2 insists that I meet my abusive partner in person

My partner packed up and disappeared with his children while I was out with friends. I was left having to foot all our bills, including rent, which has made me financially stressed.

We had a family plan with O2 which meant family phones were all registered to my account. When my partner left, he stopped paying his share of the monthly phone bill, so I set about trying to remove his, and his children's, phones from the account. O2 explained he would need to join a conference call with me and O2 to agree the transfer of the numbers in question.

Getting my ex to engage with this involved support from a mutual friend; then he claimed he could not join the conference calls. O2 had only one suggestion: that he and I meet in person for the call.

My ex is an emotionally aggressive and manipulative man. He does not know where I now live, and I want to keep it that way, so I met him in a busy park, and we spent an hour on the phone together with O2. His children's numbers successfully transferred. His number did not. O2 said it would keep working on it and ended the call.

Two weeks on, nothing has happened. O2 insists I either make another joint call with my ex, or pay his outstanding bills and cancel his phone plan.

I've explained about my financial situation and concerns about meeting up with him.

I discovered an O2 form allowing customers to flag up difficult family situations and filled it out but was told I did not qualify. I have now been sent a £164 early termination fee for the children's numbers that were removed from the plan.

My ex is deliberately manipulating this situation. I am baffled that O2 does not have a better process for women during relationship breakdown as forced meet ups could be really risky in some cases.

Name and address withheld

▲ *Trying to sort out an O2 account proved traumatic and risky*

I felt rage when I read of your plight. You had, by then, spent four weeks trying to get O2 to understand the potential risks of meeting your ex and the financial hardship his departure caused. Its response that you meet up, or pay up, was almost certainly in breach of the regulatory duty of care to vulnerable customers telecoms companies are obliged to fulfil.

When I pointed this out, O2 managed, within hours, what it had failed to do in weeks, and called you. It admitted you had been led on a debilitating wild goose chase.

Instead of subjecting you to a painful encounter in a public park, it should have served a disconnection notice giving him seven days to transfer the numbers to a new account. It duly did after a push from its press office, and cancelled the £164 charge. It has **offered you £200 in compensation but you, understandably, feel this does not reflect the anguish and expense the blunders caused you.**

O2 says: "We have a range of policies to protect and support customers who have been victims of domestic abuse, ensuring they can safely disconnect unwanted numbers without having to meet an ex-partner in person. This existing support was not accurately offered, and we apologise for the experience she had, and the time taken to resolve her issue."

My autistic son is living in fear of bailiffs sent by Ovo

My autistic son has been bombarded for years by letters to his home from OVO Energy addressed to "The Occupier", with demands for money and threats of debt collectors. He is supplied by Scottish Gas.

He was required to let an OVO agent into his flat to "prove" he didn't have an OVO meter. Neither this, nor countless phone calls, has stopped the demands.

Call centre agents confirm that he doesn't have an account but seem powerless to update the system. He lives in fear that bailiffs will break his door down.

LO, *Edinburgh*

OVO swiftly decided that the bombardment was triggered by address error on the national database. In short, it says, the gas and electricity meters supplying another property had been registered to your son's address. It corrected the address for the gas, but tells me another supplier owned the electricity meter and had "rejected multiple requests" by OVO to update the database.

In response to my queries, OVO agreed to suspend demands and issued a letter of deadlock to enable your son to complain to the Energy Ombudsman.

The letter, which enables access to the database, discovered that the electricity meter was correctly registered to a neighbouring address and supplied by OVO, but OVO had somehow got your son's address on its billing system. It was ordered to pay £150 compensation and the bills have now ceased.

We welcome letters but cannot answer individually. Email us at consumer.champions@theguardian.com or write to Consumer Champions, Money, the Guardian, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU. Please include a daytime phone number. Submission and publication of all letters is subject to our terms and conditions: http://theguardian.com/letters-terms

◀ **Ipswich, Suffolk**
£950,000
In the Victorian quarter is Morpeth House, with a blue plaque commemorating a former resident, the stamp dealer Charles Whitfield King. This is not the most instantly noticeable thing about the front of the house. The grand facade has tall sash windows and there is detailing in a deep red. Mature trees soften the brick edges. Over three floors, it has seven bedrooms and three reception rooms, many with the original fireplaces, cornicing and ceiling roses. In the grounds are an old coach house and an octagonal garden hidden away. *Jackson-Stops, 01473 218 218*

Fantasy house hunt
Homes with kerb appeal

Compiled by Anna White

▶ **Elie, Fife**
£525,000
A short walk from the beach is a bright white three-bedroom terrace cottage with masonry picked out in vivid blue. It overlooks the bustling high street in this seaside town 42 miles from Edinburgh in the East Neuk of Fife. Through the front door is a sitting room to the left with a central fireplace and large leaded window. The dining room is on the right, and the kitchen is at the back with access to a private garden. Upstairs are three double bedrooms. There's sailing and water sports in the harbour. *Savills, 0131 247 3738*

▲ **Clapham, London**
£850,000
Unlike so many properties in these parts, this two-up two-down terrace Victorian cottage has not been converted into flats. The front door opens into a hallway and then into a double reception room. The kitchen-diner is at the back where glass doors open on to the paved back garden. The current owners have planning permission for a full loft extension at the front and back. *Marsh & Parsons, 020 7501 3666*

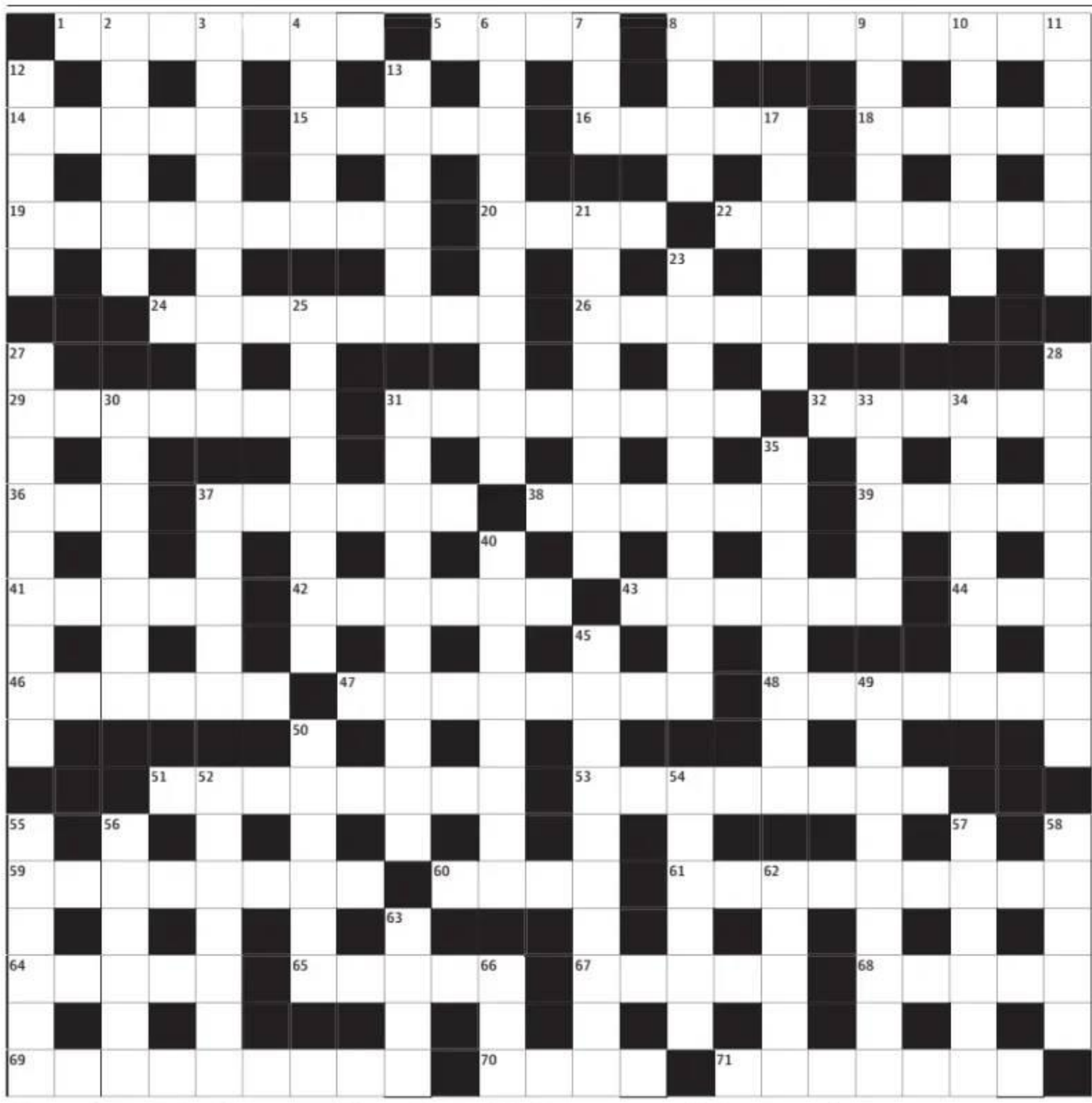
▼ **Radcliffe on Trent, Nottinghamshire**
£1m
On the popular Cropwell Road is Elm House, a six-bedroom, detached Victorian home. Through the timber-panelled front door is a traditional home with period features, albeit one that has been modernised, too. This small town is to the south-east of Nottingham, the other side of the water sports centre, Holme Pierrepont. *Fine & Country, 0115 982 2824*

◀ **York, North Yorkshire**
£1.15m
Alma Terrace is a mottled Victorian police station that had three holding cells and two dwellings for live-in officers. It has been transformed into a five-bedroom house with an office (rather than an officer) and a bar (rather than cell bars). On a corner in Fishergate, close to Rowntree Park, the handsome property has symmetrical domed windows and decorative chimneys. Kitchen units are stainless steel and there is underfloor heating running throughout the ground floor. There is a south-west facing courtyard garden. *The Modern House, 020 3795 5920*

Puzzles

Guardian cryptic crossword bank holiday special

by Maskarade



Sixteen clues consist of anagrams of thematic material, always presented in the same order.

Across

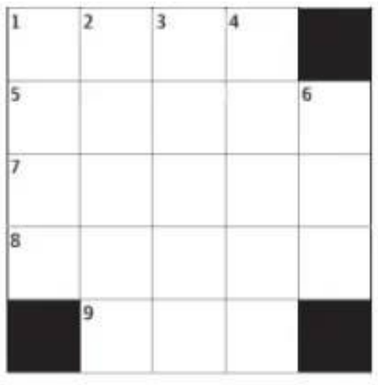
5/57 Red Sea coho (4; 6)
8/33 Clear arguments (9; 5)
14 Composer's catalogue suggested (5)
15 Merman provided discreet help, to some extent (5)
19 Ted, Vera and co., bemused, piled it on (9)
20 Stand up in shower (4)
22/10/55 Begorra! Verger won logo! (8; 6,6)
24/10/12 Maid googled 'bee eater' (4,4; 6,5)
26 Heart of philistine turned for one who denies all (8)
29 Bone's bad smell certain to return (7)
31 Reconsider, without working around critics (8)
32 Outstanding helper somehow became sloth (6)
36 My small book or two (3)
37 If thematic, name in full would appear twice pocketing Scandinavian currency (6)
38/1 Look at oval bin (6; 7)
39 Just over half the mixture is sprayed with tear gas (5)
41 Blackwood, bridge player, rather gaunt (5)
43 Nun and mariner live next to ship (6)
44 Priest met Old Vic's central characters (3)
46 Fixed time around rugged ridges (6)
47 Hotel was re-designed for David Letterman's programme (4,4)
48/33 Use place mats (2,5; 5)
51/16 Faith! Take Karl (3,5; 5)
53 Picking fruit and cereal grain and serving gin (8)
59 Park officer entered old yard with indoor fruit trees (8)
60 Figure one has only half a buck (4)
61 Olympic venue with watering hole about to entertain billionaire (9)
64 It turns round and round and round! (5)
67 To start with, just explain our new grand Korean concept of an unspoken emotonal bond (5)
68 Hymnodist from mid-Tyrone - a legend (5)
69 Audibly question the location of domestic store (9)
70 Some semester mainly (4)
71/58/37D July mess ceases - joy! (7; 5,5)

Down

3 Unconscious by a heavy blow, one not from around here (9)
4 Finished last in sprint - that's clear (5)
7 Dvorak's son-in-law at market place (3)
8 Went away with the French paper (4)
9 One blasphemes without adult responses (7)
11 Helping to remove beer from account (6)
13/42 Enriched pear (6; 6)
17 Old discourse, priest forgot to be cultivated (6)
21/63/2 Don Juan at sea in nets (8; 4,6)
23/6 Draw on bent wheel-chair (3,7; 1,1,8)
25 One's interrupting this compiler twice about Allegri composition (8)
28/34 Manchester kid's ID (4,5; 7)
30 Fictional detective depressed, carried by horse (7)
31 About to include Republican leader amid vernacular reference to his opponents (10)
35/56/18 Travel to West Crawley (8; 6,5)
40 Convertible used lane that's not yet open (8)
45/65 Tell BT - 'Help rajah' (3,3,4; 5)
49/27 Ninety dark sheep can (9; 9)
50 Instigate prison rising (4,2)
52 Engraver, stop on courtyard (7)
54/56/18 Rectory blast or two (3,3; 6,5)
62 State hair product for star (5)
66 Regular haunt that's in the garden (3)

Guardian mini crossword

For your daily mini crossword, download the Guardian app

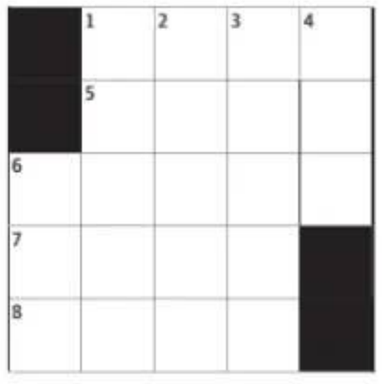


Across

1 Maritime menace (4)
5 'Affectionate' evening of character assassination (5)
7 Where you are (5)
8 Rocky debris (5)
9 Word used when referring to a ship (3)

Down

1 Precious mineral aggregates underground (4)
2 __ motel (5)
3 John Le __ (5)
4 Michaelmas daisy (5)
6 Not just any (3)



Across

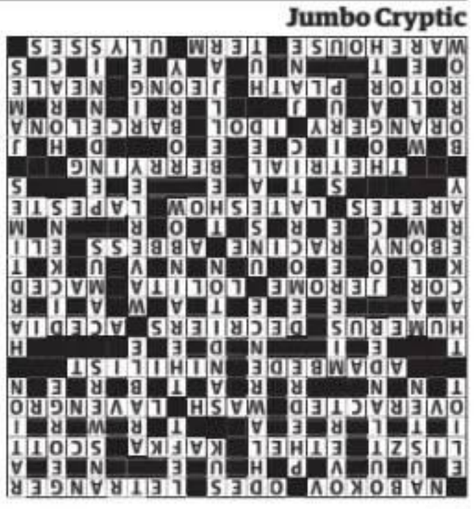
1 Agin (4)
5 'Clap along if you feel like a room without a __' (Pharrell Williams lyric) (4)
6 Crosses - Prefect and Sierra? (5)
7 Munition provision (4)
8 Paul McCartney instrument (4)

Down

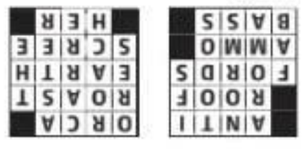
1 (Pleasant) scent (5)
2 Accepted standards of behaviour within a society (5)
3 Fusses (2-3)
4 Associates of ands and buts (3)
6 Descriptor of Paul McCartney (3)

Solutions

Jumbo Cryptic

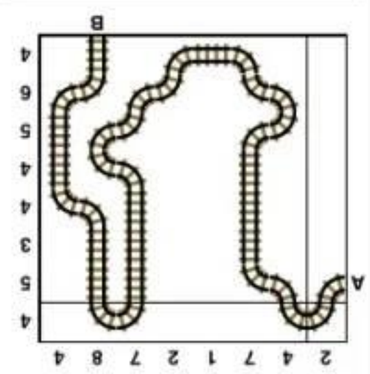


Mini



Puzzles

Solutions



Train tracks

ALLEGORIC
Word wheel

4	1	3	2	4	2
3	2	4	1	5	1
4	1	5	3	2	3
2	3	2	1	4	5
4	1	4	5	3	1
3	2	3	1	4	2

Suguru

Codeword

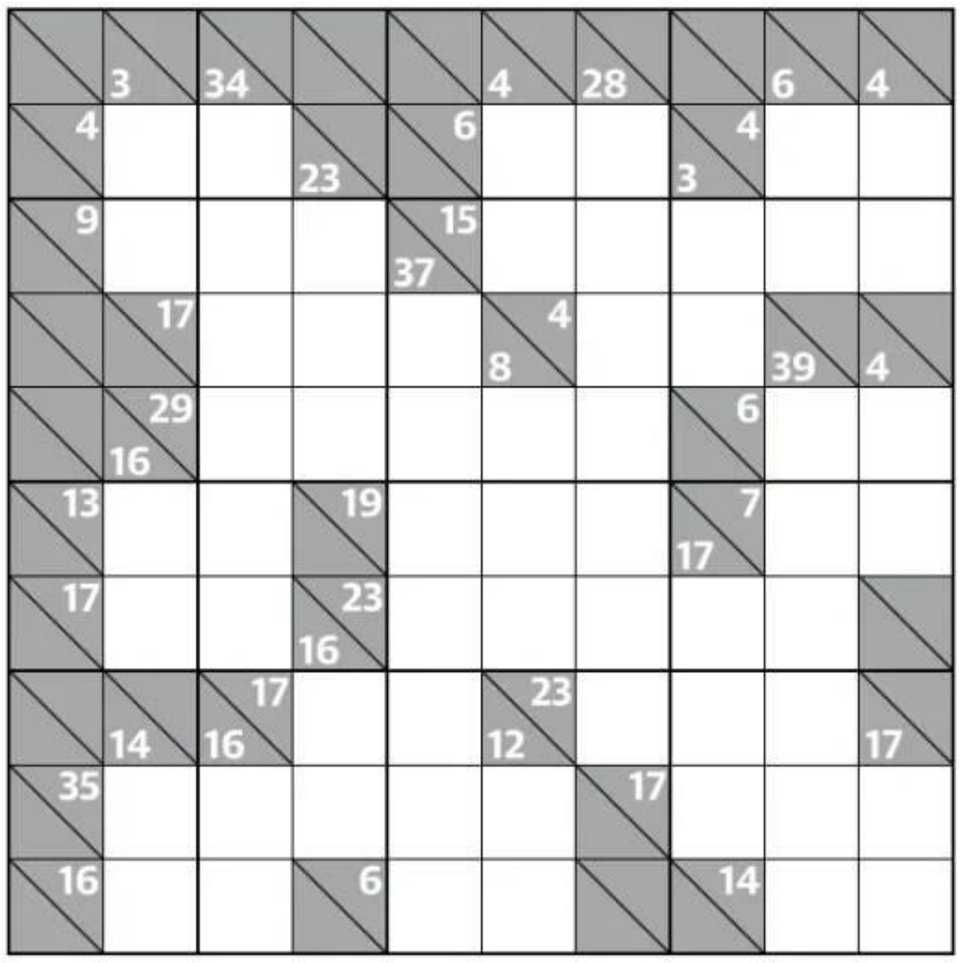
9	7		2	4		6	8	
5	9	7	6	8		1	7	9
		9	8		6	9	8	
9	8		4	1	2	7	9	
7	6		9	3	7		4	3
	9	8	7	4	1		5	1
	7	9	1		3	1		
2	1	6		3	4	2	5	1
1	3			1	5		1	3

Kakuro

Solution no 126
Quick cryptic

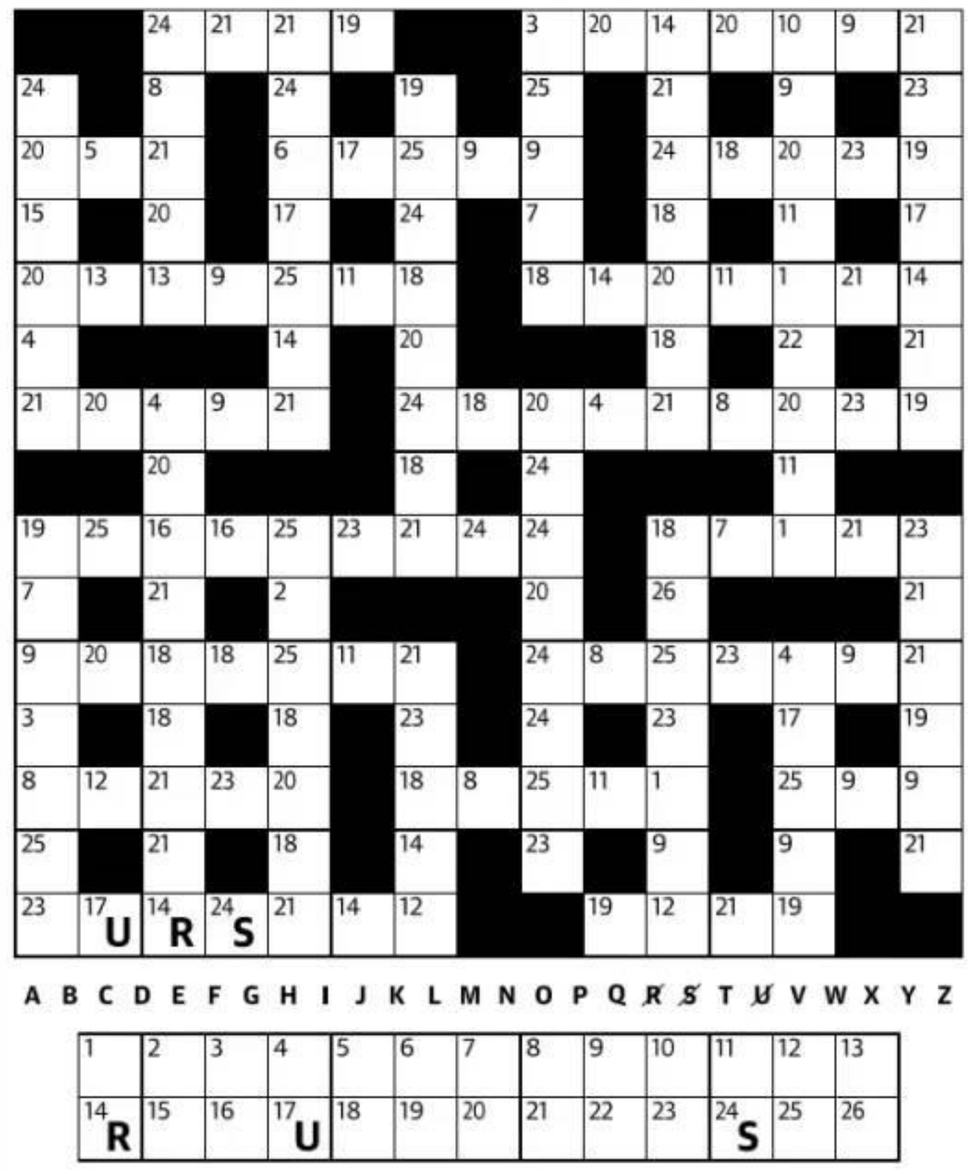
Kakuro

Fill the grid so that each block adds up to the total in the box above or to the left of it. You can only use the digits 1-9 and you must not use the same number twice in a block.



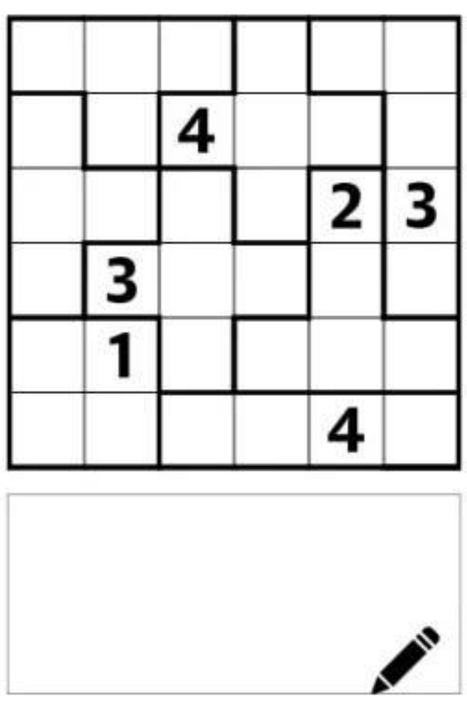
Codeword

Crack the code to fill in the crossword grid. Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. A number of letters have been decoded to help with the identification of other letters and words in the grid.



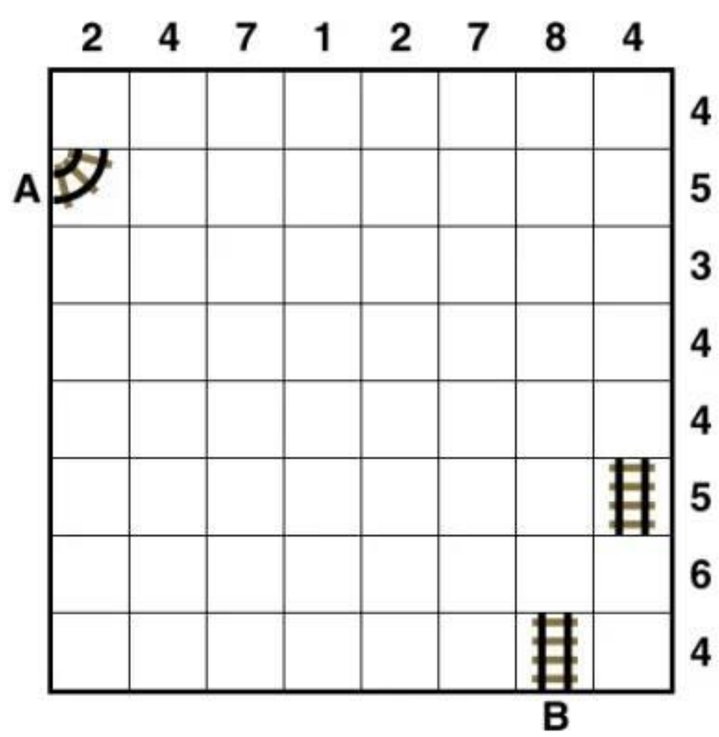
Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.



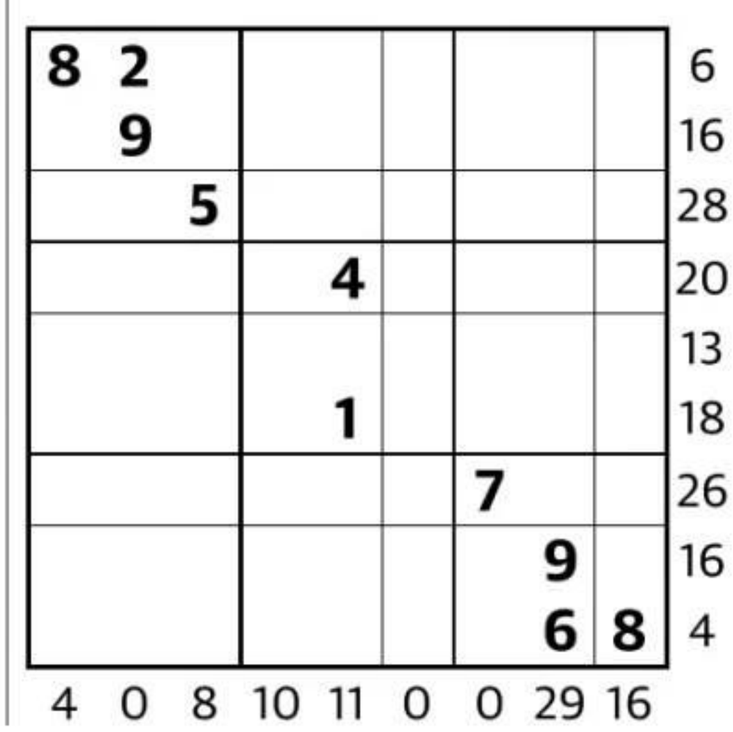
Train tracks

Lay tracks to enable the train to travel from village A to village B. The numbers indicate how many sections of rail go in each row and column. There are only straight rails and curved rails. The track cannot cross itself.



Sandwich sudoku

Medium
Place the digits from 1-9 in each row, column and 3x3 block. The clues outside the grid show the sum of the numbers placed between the 1 and 9 in that row or column.



Puzzles

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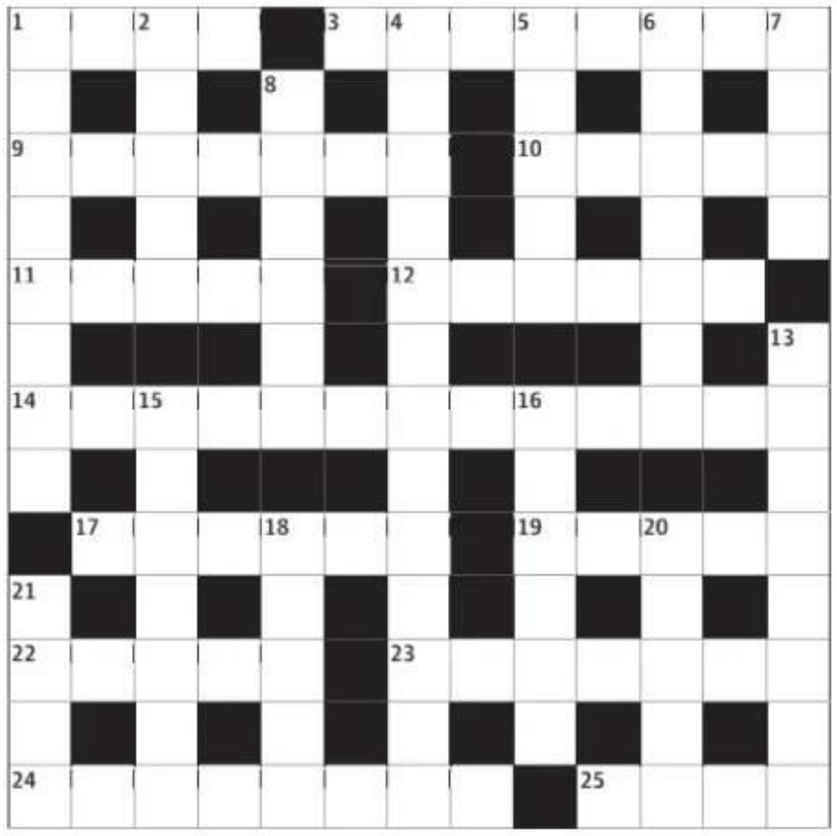
Quick crossword no 17,571

Across
1 Gentle flow (4)
3 Small hand-held telescope - The Amber __ (8)
9 Portable computers (7)
10 Dance - __ No.5 (Lou Bega) (5)
11 Small, U-shaped bone in neck - oh, DIY! (anag) (5)
12 Large flatfish (6)
14 One who stirs up trouble (8-5)
17 Mark Carney became its PM in 2025 (6)
19 Life, fire or body (5)
22 House, lies or wash (5)
23 __ bun - London football team (7)
24 Do or request something daring (4,4)
25 Harp-like instrument (4)

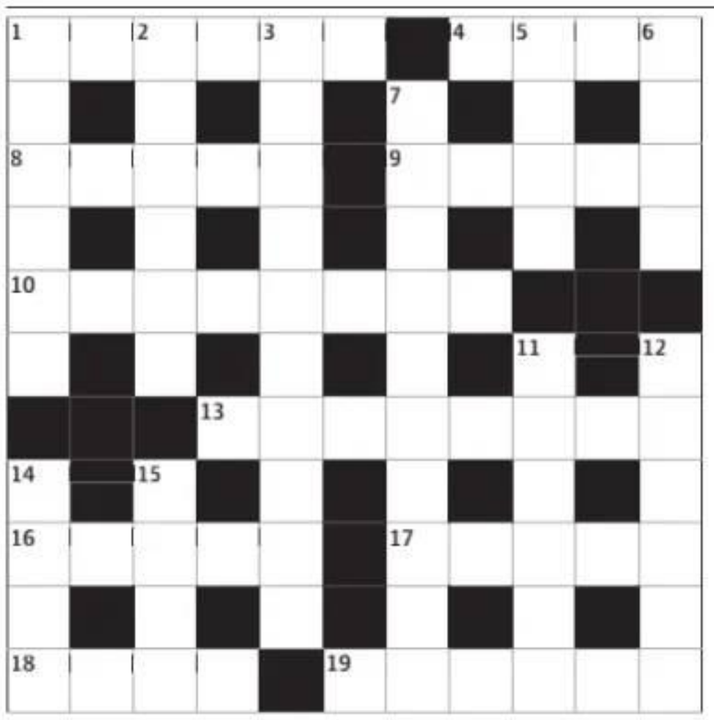
Down
1 US state - with '!', a stage musical (8)
2 Youngest Marx brother (5)
4 Ripping children's party game? (4,3,6)
5 One who competes on computer, video etc (5)
6 Wrestling move (7)
7 Slovenly, lazy person (4)
8 Thingamy (6)
13 Person who has obtained a degree (8)
15 Queasy on the water (7)
16 Anything that attracts (6)
18 Bitter and sour - brace (anag) (5)
20 Analysis of (eg) purity of precious metals (5)
21 Stay afloat (4)



Word wheel

Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least two others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word. Target: Excellent-51. Very good-44. Good -36. Target -28.

Guardian quick cryptic crossword
No 126 set by Chandler



Across
1 A padre interfered with procession (6)
4 Some rush opposite retail outlet (4)
8 Disprove first signs of rubbish expressed by unpredictable Trump (5)
9 After hearing, went after pamphlet (5)
10 By the sound of it, manages abroad (8)
13 Pastry I'd designed for brief excursions (3,5)
16 Thing on which a pianist sits is too little in part (5)
17 Heads of new offices trading extra details of significance (5)
18 Feel sick consuming jellied food (4)
19 Greatly loves stuff kept by matador, essentially (6)

Down
1 Member of the clergy ordering aprons (6)
2 Initially, rummage under boxes in eager search for jewels (6)
3 Bet set lead arranged is loathsome (10)
5 Get better part of a shoe, we're told (4)
6 Feel sorry for chap I typically embraced (4)
7 Suffering difficulties, became less bent for an audience (10)
11 Sift trifle nervously (6)
12 To begin with, all seem inhibited discussing events solely in private comments (6)
14 Small offshore community engaged by tennis lessons (4)
15 Dirty chickens and others, reportedly (4)

TODAY'S TRICKS Clues begin or end with a definition of the answer. The rest is one of these:
Anagram Anagram of answer and hint that there's an anagram 'Senator arranged crime (7)' gives TREASON
Hidden word(s) Answer hidden in clue's words 'Some have altered meat (4)' gives VEAL
Soundalike Something that sounds like answer 'Excited, Oscar's announced (4)' gives WILD
Acrostic First letters of answer
'Initially get a good joke (3)' gives GAG

Yesterday's
Quick crossword

Solution no 17,570

C	A	S	H	F	L	O	W	■	B	A	C	H
O	■	K	■	U	■	X	■	Q	■	I	■	O
S	T	I	L	L	■	F	L	U	T	T	E	R
H	■	J	■	L	■	O	■	E	■	C	■	N
■	D	U	T	Y	F	R	E	E	S	H	O	P
S	■	M	■	C	■	D	■	N	■	■	■	I
T	O	P	P	L	E	■	U	S	E	D	U	P
U	■	■	■	O	■	P	■	G	■	I	■	E
D	I	G	I	T	A	L	W	A	T	C	H	■
E	■	R	■	H	■	A	■	M	■	T	■	L
N	A	I	V	E	T	Y	■	B	L	A	Z	E
T	■	M	■	D	■	E	■	I	■	T	■	N
S	T	Y	X	■	T	R	O	T	T	E	R	S

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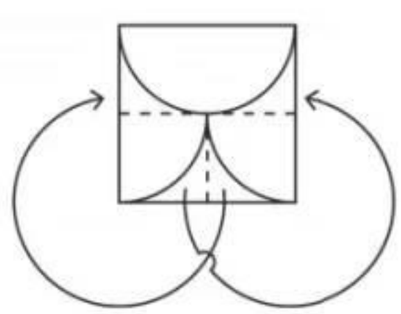
Chris Maslanka
Solutions

1 Each iteration of the 4s reading from left to right is cube-rooted one more than the one before except the first which is cube-rooted once. Rewriting the expression as $(4(1/3))(4(1/9))(4(1/27))$... we have 4^n, where $n = 1/3 + 1/3^2 + 1/3^3 + 1/3^4 \ldots = (1/3)[1 + 1/3 + 1/3^2 + 1/3^3 + \ldots] = (1/3)[1/[1 - 1/3] = (1/3)/(2/3) = 1/2$. Therefore $x = 4^{1/2} = \sqrt{4} = 2$. Her second method was even simpler: let the infinite product be x. Then $x^3 = 4x$, whence $x(x^2 - 4) = 0$; this has 3 roots $x = 0$; $x = -2$; $x = 2$. We discard the first two (the value must be positive), leaving $x = 2$.
2 Here's one way to see it: bisect the stem vertically and move the two halves as shown here. This then completes the upper half of the square. So it takes up half the square. **Point to Ponder:** Does the chalice tessellate? Here we have done it by dissection and translation. Can it be done by

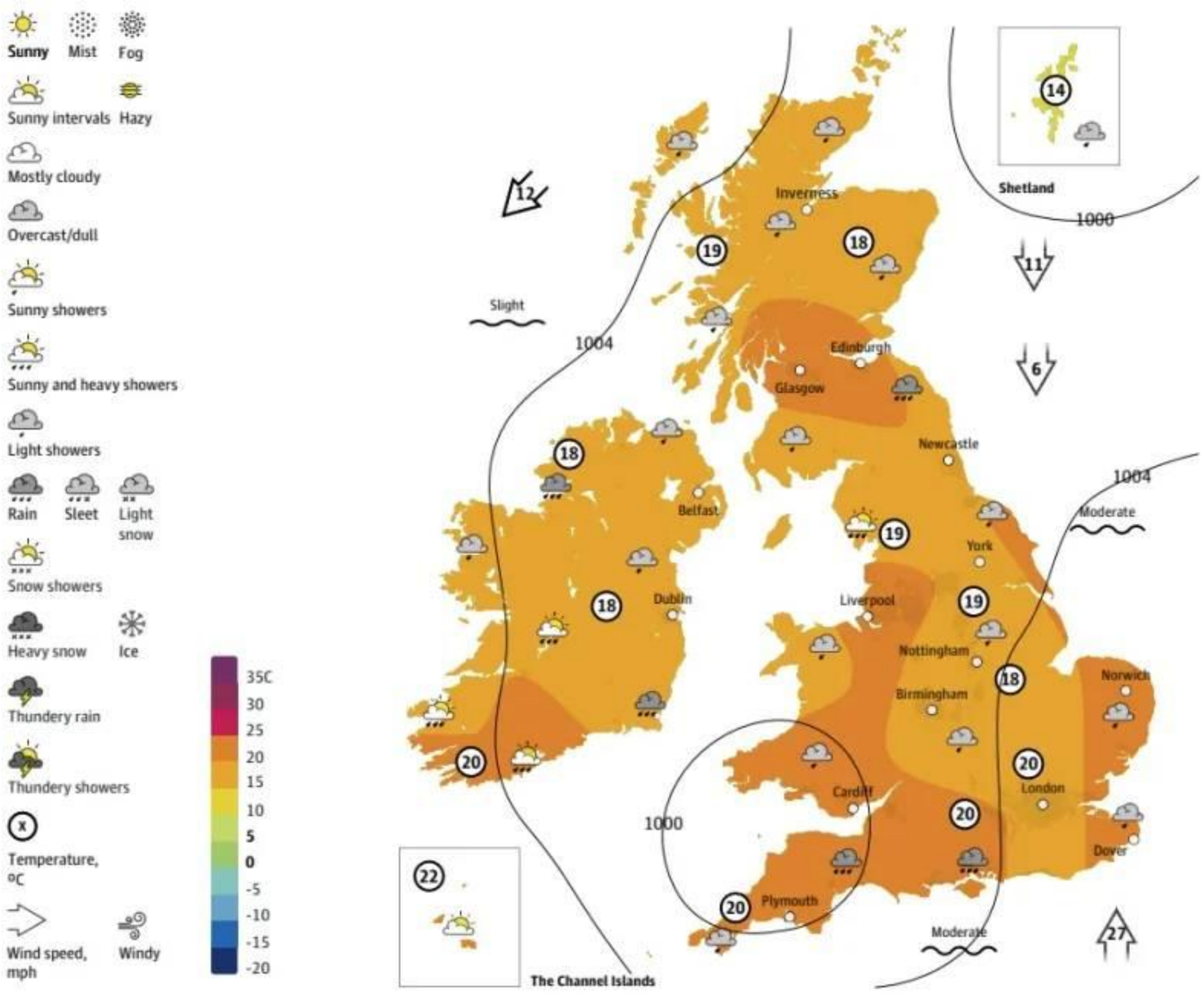


dissection and hingeing alone? (A tough one for resilient fans of calculus: What is the volume of the whole 3-D chalice if its radius is r? Will Pappus help?)
3 Gus's chances are ¼. The odds are 3:1 in Bart's favour. [Chances of an odd product are $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$.]
4 In fact $\sqrt{(n + 1)} - \sqrt{(n)}$, where n is a positive integer, decreases monotonically with increasing n. We can show this by rationalising the numerator (not the denominator for a change!). Here $\sqrt{101} - \sqrt{100} = 1/(\sqrt{101} + \sqrt{100})$ and $\sqrt{100} - \sqrt{99} = 1/(\sqrt{100} + \sqrt{99})$. The first denominator exceeds the second as $\sqrt{101} > \sqrt{99}$; so the first fraction is less than the second; so $\sqrt{101} - \sqrt{100} < \sqrt{100} - \sqrt{99}$.

Wordplay
Wordpool c); a); c)
E pluribus unum KALEIDOSCOPE
Same Difference CRAYON, RAYON
Dropouts ALLIANCE
Missing Links a) simple/ton/weight b) flight/path/finder c) hat/red/flag d) Norse/sage/city e) family/tree/house f) man/power/drill

Weather
Saturday 29 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today



Forecast

Low 14 High 20
Tomorrow

Low 12 High 18
Monday

Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

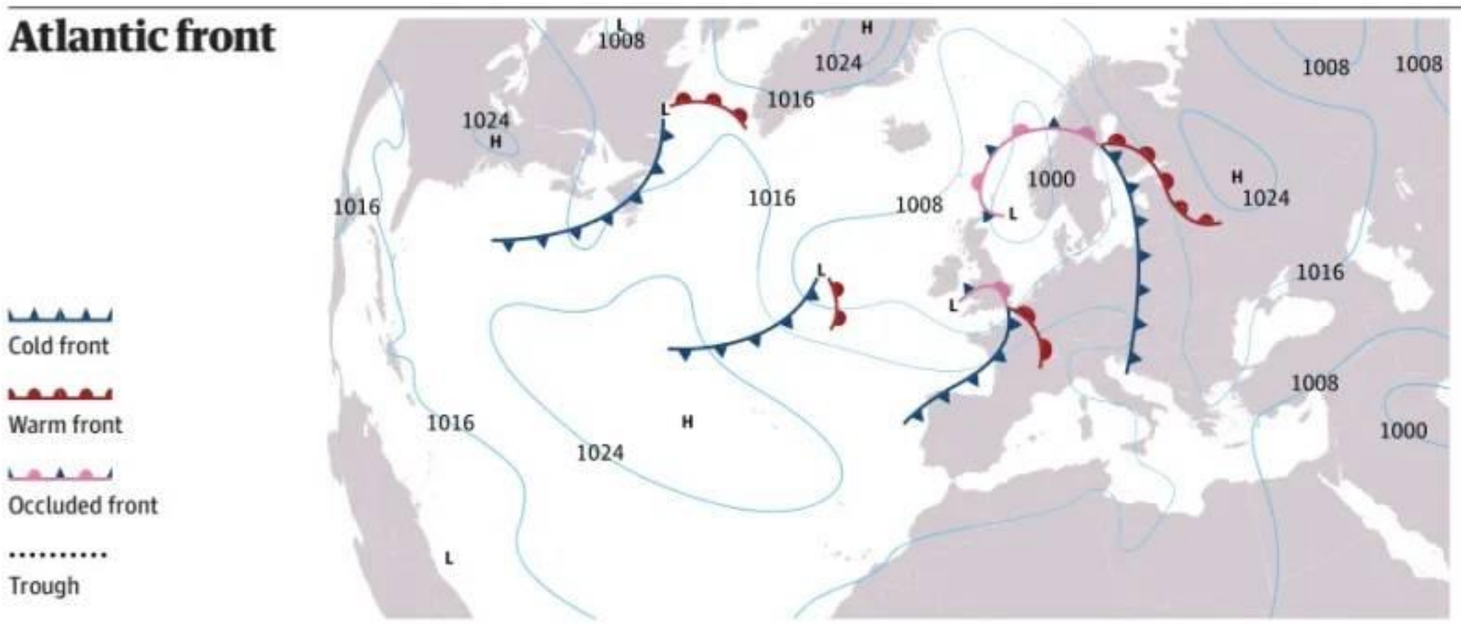
Latest	
25 Aug 2026	427.03
Weekly average	
16 Aug 2026	426.98
28 Aug 2025	425.60
28 Aug 2016	402.11
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	15 20	90%	Low
Manchester	14 18	90%	Low
Edinburgh	12 20	50%	Low
Belfast	12 18	65%	Low
Birmingham	13 18	95%	Low
Brighton	15 19	70%	Low
Bristol	15 20	95%	Low
Cardiff	15 20	90%	Low
Newcastle	13 19	85%	Low
Penzance	16 20	60%	Low

Atlantic front



Weather tracker

After an "unprecedented" deluge in Chiba in mid-August, Japan has experienced further extreme rainfall in recent days. Moisture from the Sea of Japan brought relentless heavy rain to the prefectures of Ishikawa and Toyama on Thursday.

In Himi, Toyama, 361.5mm (14.2in) of rain fell in 24 hours, equivalent to half the average annual rainfall in London and Paris. Several rivers burst their banks, triggering flash floods and mudslides, felling trees and damaging buildings.

The Japan Meteorological Agency issued its highest-level rain warning for the two prefectures this week, as well as landslide warnings, leading to the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people. Models on Thursday indicated that a further 200mm of rain could fall just south of this region.

Two days earlier, Typhoon Saudel had passed through the prefectures of Kagoshima and Okinawa Island, south-west of the mainland, bringing winds of 100mph and extreme rainfall. In the Amami region, 230mm of rain fell in a day. The storm was forecast to move into south-east China by the end of the week. **Brendan Wood and Faye Hulton** *MetDesk*

Around the world

Algiers	31	Lisbon	27
Ams'dam	21	Madrid	31
Athens	31	Malaga	28
Auckland	15	Melb'rne	15
B Aires	16	Mexico C	22
Bangkok	32	Miami	33
Barcelona	29	Milan	31
Basra	49	Mombasa	30
Beijing	32	Moscow	20
Berlin	25	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	31	N Orleans	34
Brussels	21	Nairobi	25
Budapest	29	New Delhi	36
C'hagen	20	New York	26
Cairo	35	Oslo	18
Cape Town	18	Paris	21
Chicago	27	Perth	20
Corfu	33	Prague	24
Dakar	30	Reykjavik	10
Dhaka	33	Rio de J	30
Dublin	17	Rome	32
Florence	32	Shanghai	32
Gibraltar	26	Singapore	33
H Kong	32	Stockh'm	16
Harare	22	Strasb'g	25
Helsinki	20	Sydney	18
Istanbul	26	Tel Aviv	33
Jo'burg	21	Tenerife	29
K Lumpur	34	Tokyo	26
K'mandu	28	Toronto	26
Kabul	33	Vancouv'r	20
Kingston	34	Vienna	27
Kolkata	31	Warsaw	22
L Angeles	35	Wash'ton	29
Lagos	28	Well'ton	15
Lima	25	Zurich	25

High tides

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Aberdeen	0140	4.3m	1413	4.1m	**London Bridge**	0226	6.8m	1442	6.9m
Avonmouth	0754	12.5m	2011	12.8m	**Lossiemouth**	0012	4.1m	1246	3.9m
Barrow	--	--	1205	8.8m	**Milford Haven**	0648	6.8m	1904	7.1m
Belfast	1137	3.2m	2338	3.5m	**Newquay**	0538	6.7m	1754	7.0m
Cobh	0559	3.9m	1815	4.0m	**North Shields**	0346	5.1m	1617	4.9m
Cromer	0653	5.1m	1932	4.8m	**Oban**	0624	3.8m	1843	4.1m
Dover	1138	6.6m	2354	6.5m	**Penzance**	0511	5.3m	1728	5.6m
Dublin	--	--	1209	3.8m	**Plymouth**	0628	5.2m	1839	5.4m
Galway	0550	4.9m	1757	5.1m	**Portsmouth**	--	--	1214	4.6m
Greenock	0049	3.4m	1307	3.1m	**Southport**	1122	8.8m	2332	9.2m
Harwich	0019	3.9m	1227	3.8m	**Stornoway**	0724	4.6m	1931	5.0m
Holyhead	1058	5.3m	2308	5.7m	**Portland**	0743	2.0m	1958	2.2m
Hull	0643	7.4m	1917	7.2m	**Whitby**	0422	5.6m	1652	5.4m
Leith	0302	5.5m	1528	5.4m	**Wick**	--	--	1208	3.3m
Liverpool	1147	9.1m	2357	9.5m	**Workington**	--	--	1209	8.0m

Sun & Moon

Sun rises	0608
Sun sets	1953
Moon rises	2007
Moon sets	0732
Last Quarter	4 Sept

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2024 to 0628
Birm'ham	2002 to 0615
Brighton	1952 to 0611
Bristol	2004 to 0620
Carlisle	2011 to 0614
Cork	2028 to 0643
Dublin	2022 to 0631
Glasgow	2020 to 0618
Harlech	2012 to 0623
Inverness	2022 to 0613
London	1953 to 0609
M'chester	2006 to 0615
Newcastle	2007 to 0609
Norwich	1950 to 0602
Penzance	2013 to 0634

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